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DANIEL MARDER:

The Szechwan Variation

At the age of twenty-two, Dmitri Simpkoff had become such a master of languages that the Far Eastern University of Vladivostok appointed him to their Oriental faculty. The appointment was timely. If it had not come through, Simpkoff would have been forced into the Czar's Army. Instead, he spent the next three years of his life at the University, vigorously investigating a dialect variation spoken only in the South of Szechwan Province. He read all the available histories, unearthed a great volume of little known folklore and compiled maps and charts and figures. At the end of this period, however, he had to stop though his study was not completed and nothing had been conclusively proven. He had to stop because he could go no further. Not a library in Vladivostok would yield him anything more. "To complete my study," Simpkoff clearly saw, "I must necessarily enter the field itself." No alternatives were weighed nor any decision rendered; he was impelled. In February, 1917, the University extended a grant and he chose the city of Luchow on the Yangtze as headquarters for his field work.

He was eager to leave as soon as possible, but he had to face the fact of winter, that in winter ice blocks the Vladivostok port. This meant waiting and never before had time been empty for him. Automatically, he returned to his work. Under pressure it would assume various shapes and forms but yielded no addition. He went,

finally, to the cafes and cabarets of the frozen city where he listened to gossip about Bolsheviks and the possible American entry into the European War. This gossip passed through him, untouched and untouching. Combat bored Simpkoff. But when the talk turned to the War Lords still fighting in some provinces of China, his curiosity was fired. His ear became especially sensitive to any mention of Szechwan.

And when the ice finally broke into floes, Szechwan had changed for him. It was not only where a dialect played peculiar variations. It was a province depopulated by a revolution five years back, an actual space of earth, houses and trees in which fifteen million souls had been destroyed, many of them, he had to reflect, perhaps all, crying out in the language he was going to define.

Soon steamers began to appear in the port. They came and departed, but they were Japanese. On the tenth of April a Russian ship sailed.

According to the shipping catalogues, the sea was calm at that time of year, but it bucked and bolted nevertheless. Simpkoff wondered about his own, the Black Sea; not the sea itself, but his notion of it which had also been calm until then. And he considered his fears. Fears came naturally to everyone the first time at sea, Simpkoff thought, so he made up a variety of them and conjugated them like classic verbs. At Nagasaki he began a little notebook, in Japanese. He did not write of the ice floes about Vladivostok nor of the wet air at Nagasaki. For the present, he decided to mark down only the names of all the new places he was encountering.

On the second morning out of Nagasaki, the steamer, *Lastashka,* infiltrated a forest of masts and sails, of destroyers and merchant ships and junks sitting a knot up the river from Shanghai. Simpkoff was puzzling at the skyline. He wondered whether its great domes, its Greek columns and its gables fitted best an overall pattern of Byzantine, Roman, Renaissance or Neo-Classic, when the word, "Shanghai!" burst in his ear. It was Madame Grovenka. Simpkoff had kicked her their first night out while seeking his cabin door in the dark. She apparently had the technique of sudden appearance and perhaps considered this explosion in his ear a mere whisper.

"Shanghai so soon," she said with less power. "I think I'm afraid. You needn't pity."

She was not the first of her kind to him but the first Simpkoff had been willing to endure since leaving his home on the Black Sea,

perhaps because the rings on her fingers (he had counted eight huge radiating stones, one a ruby atop a plain gold wedding band) mystified him. Still he thought her a box of old-style Russian curiosity filled with surface observations, petty interests and profane questions. He endured her with a benign smile.

The rings, she explained, were all that remained of a fortune which had been forfeited to the Czar's government because of her husband's revolutionary activity. Her present "flight from the Motherland" was still another forfeit. As Simpkoff listened, lines of sincerity grew into his smile, but then, slowly, as her questioning fell upon him—"Are you Siberian? You are not in uniform? Are you one of those crazy revolutionaries? Oh, my God!" (She crossed herself, her eyes above.) "Don't listen to me, it's my husband, killed stinking up a pot of revolt. The government has sent you perhaps? You are going to Shanghai?" —his smile cracked and broke altogether. He suffered a complete Russian moment in which he was with her, the same as she, and he was angry for it, calling himself "Atavistic," regardless of the Black Sea which the present waters had instantly become and of the fields he imagined (gold upright blades blown as in the paintings) where Madame Grovenka flushed a vague dancing heart, so light, so vulgar.

"Yes," he lied, "the government sent me," not stating which government.

The next morning, with his smile reformed and with apparent disgust for his pointless lie, he evaded further inquiry. "My mission cannot be divulged," he told her childishly.

"How cruel you are. A revolutionary, that's what I believe. You will come see me in Shanghai? I have no one."

Madame Grovenka was much too stout for Simpkoff, her dress and coat such ordinary, dull garments, worn too well and fitting ill. Because of a mole starting out of a freckle over her lip, he guessed her age was ten years above his own. The flagrancy of her ringed fingers alone was enough to dismiss from Simpkoff's mind those gentlest ideas he might entertain for any civilized and orderly being. This morning it was she, rather than himself, who was disgusting.

All along deck, passengers began to bargain with the sampan men. Madame Grovenka demonstrated a vociferous tongue. When the bargaining was concluded, however, she hesitated and then refused to descend into the little wooden cylinder. "It will fall apart. I don't trust it." Finally she did consent, there being no other way to get

ashore; and then her objections to the odors, exclaimed between expressions of pity for the man pulling with a single oar at the stern, continued till they reached the wharf.

Late that afternoon Simpkoff boarded a Jardine side-wheeler for his trip up the Yangtze. He had written nothing in his Japanese notebook about Shanghai or about Madame Grovenka. He had no time to inspect the city; that was reserved for the return trip. The mystery of Madame Grovenka's rings was still not solved to his satisfaction. He had asked about them again and received a more compatible lie. Though she was not in his notebook he did not forget her. And there was one other thing he carried away with him.

It was something he had seen rolling along the Bund and fidgeting and ferreting in the crowds on Nanking Road. It was a thing of stubs, no arms, no legs, and no speech except to plead "Cumshaw" from its blurred face while propelling itself like a drum with protruding corks. At first sight this was no more shocking than finding tramcars on the Bund. It was only a curiosity and rather a pleasure, fitting things known to one's experiencing of them, until he happened to listen, before sailing, to a group of coolies cajoling and nudging each other.

"Peeseh, Peeseh!" one was saying, "I would not give one copper for her."

"Lakuning Peeseh!" said another, imitating the first. A ducklike noise interrupted.

Simpkoff looked downward to the source of the noise. He saw the beggar, who was uttering some garble of which Simpkoff could only catch, "Foreign garbage." Then, the others formed a laughing circle around the beggar and began kicking his groin. "Speak up, speak up." The beggar howled "Cumshaw, cumshaw, cumshaw," and laughed also, ducklike as before, his covered groin rocking the naked torso on the sidewalk.

As the side-wheeler climbed back out of the Whangpoo, Simpkoff noted the appearance of a mist, which persisted as they started up the Yangtze. "Always ahead, inland," he wrote in Japanese. "This is China's richest land, the Yangtze Valley. This afternoon an English-speaking man—we did not bother with names—had no idea of it. He seemed rather intelligent, but not to know where one is? He knew only that he came from Shanghai and was going to Hankow. I believe I startled him, speaking so well for my age. His eyes, while I spoke, seemed to be inspecting my capacities for understanding, but

then, nodding in appreciation, he suddenly excused himself and disappeared. Later when I approached him he acknowledged me and moved off. I wonder if I have frightened him. But he seemed so intelligent." Simpkoff wrote that the land was flat and irrigated wet. "The roads are too narrow for a bicycle." Later he began to count the canals which poured into the Yangtze, some larger ones offering up junks whose chanting oarsmen annoyed him. Having missed some, he decided to make his count more accurate upon his return trip.

On board he heard no one speak of the provincial wars, nor did he speak of them. In fact, since his encounter with the English-speaking man, Simpkoff was aloof to the other passengers, whom he dismissed as a pack of Grovenkas full of chatter and imposed friendship. Instead of them, he diverted himself with facts, remembering that this river, which he now called the "Yangtzekiang," and the Yellow River created this rich valley by their deposits of sediment stolen from the highlands of Tibet and carted three thousand miles through the mountains since long before the first of China's twenty fallen dynasties. He called to mind several of these dynasties, and then how they came so abruptly and bloodily to their end. Finally, the diversion itself rediverted him to the possibility of war in the land he was entering.

"I do not care for any sort of bravery," he wrote in his Japanese notebook the morning after a night wild with dreams and wakes. "What the world means by bravery is a Cossack or a pioneer. That is stupid. But I must say a man who follows his work into an uncertain country, though neither brave nor courageous, is at least up to these others and not nearly so stupid." This entry worked to settle him for the morning and to allow freedom for enjoyment of his intellect. He took pleasure in Wuhu, for instance, the city that rose out of the paddy fields. Workers, bending in the fields, appeared like statuettes against the slow-rising hills in the distance. There was pleasure in his knowledge that the land to the North would become brown while to the South only greener and that soon the hills would grow and become wooded and within twelve miles of present position he would experience the name, "Nine Lotus Flower Mountain," its rugged peaks and peeping temples, its burial mounds of great and imaginary Saints. The mist on the river, he ascertained, was just about twelve miles ahead, perhaps caught by the mountain.

The mist was not so far away and where the Nine Lotus Flower should have been were five peaks, equal to each other and to any

five peaks casually chosen in Russia or elsewhere. If there were any temples and mounds they were either hidden or jumbled in the rock. Still, one of them was the Nine Lotus Flower. Simpkoff felt it unjust, but not angrily, for this after all was a ludicrous feeling, as when he heard laughter from the dirty-cork-drummed beggar. If the beggar had only been what he was supposed to be, Simpkoff would not have to carry him along and would perhaps discover the mountain. To rid himself, Simpkoff went so far as to wonder if it were possible that the beggar had somewhere hidden those missing legs and arms. This had to be settled, some extant idea had to fit it and close it; he struggled. The idea he hit upon in the Yangtze that afternoon was an old one. Having gone through them all he returned to this: "One must learn to accept evil." On reflection he found this applied to Madame Grovenka as well. He pursued it no further.

The city of Ankiang was the next item on his journey. According to his information, the city was considered a boat, having two anchors actually fixed on its walls. Its Pagoda swung in the wind, tingling seven stories of bells, and was said to be the boat's mast. Ping and Chiang, which Simpkoff interpreted as "sail" and "oar" while he informed himself, were two names never appointed to official positions in the city because then it might float away down the river. Simpkoff anticipated a respectful humor to guide him through this primitiveness, but with all this story Ankiang was a place differing only slightly from the next, Kiukian, City of Nine Rivers, having no separate essence. Both were only as Shanghai had been, merely the knowledge he already had plus the tramcars.

Passing through the Lushan mountains he felt tired and dejected and unsatisfied. A flight of wild ducks in good formation were waving along with the air currents high above. These were not new to him and not Chinese. He had seen wild ducks before but had never really observed them as now, and now they recalled his town on the Black Sea where he could just as well have watched them. The town appeared cleaner than he could actually remember it, its streets the widest possible, and the buildings were straight and stood squarely, each apart from another. In the markets no smell could alloy that of the fresh-cut flowers, the shoppers had sun-shining faces wrapped in kerchiefs as magazines pictured them. His father was haggling with the grain merchants while his well-made fingers slipped through grain in the barrels. Simpkoff came to regret the ducks before they disappeared; their flight seemed to have taken his greater

part away. When they were gone he called what remained of him, "Unhappy." One of his thoughts was to have shot a bullet at them, to scatter them, destroy their inane mathematics. They left him feeling as nothing, without color, without motion, a sad thing that had only pity to turn upon itself. With this he landed at Hankow.

The Bund in Hankow was esplanaded and not cramped with Chinese. Simpkoff went immediately to the Chinese City. He wanted to know if it had been rebuilt since its destruction five years ago. He saw the Chinese living in the open, in straw huts, under sloping canopies hung from naked walls, and in sampans on the Han River. The jammed boats hid the water except for spots where empty buckets were dipped in and full ones splashed out and where occasional nude buttocks hung over. He returned to the Bund and arranged passage for Luchow. Then he went aboard to sleep but felt too sad for it.

His cabin was just a closet, a single wooden bunk and a sink. Having slept in his underwear since Shanghai, Simpkoff began to think he might smell. He read from an American novel and then from a linguistics book. He shaved, went back to bed and read over a hundred pages of his work on the Szechwan Variation, bothered all the while by his idea that this, his own body, his arms for instance, smelled independently. And then, still reading, he began to think of the Chinese, whether they were a happy people or not. Suddenly he discovered a certain basic difference which existed between himself and Grovenka and the beggar. They were not unhappy. She merely feigned unhappiness, while the beggar had no visions about either happiness or unhappiness. He, Simpkoff, was the only one unhappy. Without struggle he pushed out an answer. "A man," he wrote in his Japanese notebook, "is unhappy when his experiences do not fit his values." Entitled now to his unhappiness, he was still unable to sleep.

Gradually the concern for his own odor induced that of the sampans. He tried to separate it from the river's, an animal odor, one of buds blooming sour, of sweet decay, the wet off a coolie's back. The sampans' odor hinted of something concealed within the ice floes, of released wet air at Nagasaki, things not written in his notebook. He deciphered the odor's individual components as he thought the Frenchman would do with an accomplished sauce served him and as he himself intended to do with the language at Luchow. This final method was successful, he was able to sleep.

In the morning he marked the mist as they moved up the river

again. He made this note: "Imagine Grovenka with rosy cheeks and a narrow nose! I am beginning to have dreams. This is the second within a week."

The river was wan and the country was dull now for he knew little of it. Rafted logs drifted into the river from canals. The countryside was a patchwork of rice paddies, and here and there grown with tea. While setting the mist at various points in the distance, he imagined his future life at Luchow and then asked himself if it were possible he might want Madame Grovenka and how it was with other men who could just take a woman without a thought of themselves. He wondered about the beggar's life in this respect and was brought back to contemplating the possibilities of war and danger he now risked. The Jardine side-wheeler had carried him beyond the point where he had set the mist. He saw more paddy fields here and set the mist again. Lazily his eye caught an elusive object bobble up in the water. It was pale and arc-like in shape. He recalled seeing it before, during the day. Simpkoff watched the object as they paddled past and then felt the sun was too hot to think anymore. The "Yangtze Gorges" were next in line of interest. He fell asleep, woke in Ichiang, then dozed.

When he woke fully it appeared that he was in the midst of a small lake which had tall granite walls instead of shores. He seemed to himself like an impurity in some god's drinking cup. This drinking cup, he realized, was the chasm before the "Gorges." A strip of sky indicated a cleft in the wall directly ahead and before long the Yangtze narrowed down again, not to a wan river, but to rapids shunting rafted logs and houseboats past his side-wheeler. It was chugging hard against the river full of noise. Coolies at the end of long bamboo ropes were pulling a large junk against the current, their feet stumbling up steps hewn into the limestone walls, their chants from the cliff's black shadows held down by low snow clouds.

A certain "Pillar of Heaven," a pinnacle rising straight from the water, was in the vicinity. But the immediate rocks were made into towers and buttresses and grottos, and further and higher were ramparts, irregular stone battlements, and still further he clearly saw summits covered with pine and all powdered white while just above him the snow clouds rolled low over huge needles, pillared shrines and festooned canopies. All of it was run through by a gentle stream meandering down past broad ledges growing maidenhair, making a half-circle in the middle of Simpkoff's scene, arching over a cluster

of primroses on an indented ledge and then tumbling off into the river. Simpkoff wished that he might make a poem.

The primroses were affecting an indifference while resisting the grand forces nature had placed around them. Simpkoff began to frown on himself as though his ears had heard his head and his heart. "Fantasy," he said to himself in order to define his feelings. He heard the water ripple, then swirl, then it seemed to go still. Instantly a growing clangor arose, and looking, Simpkoff saw another chanting junk in the current. He added his own voice, "Fortissimo chant of wild men!" Then everything stopped. Angrily he repeated the word, "Fortissimo!" What found its way into his Japanese notebook that evening was only this: "Poets prefer to cry and blush unseen."

But this notation did not conclude the day. He lay on his bunk neither crying nor blushing, but realizing that he knew nothing of poets or their preferences, that whatever had happened would continue to happen the further he went, would become worse, and that a real pioneer, a real Cossack, a real poet—only these could endure it. And his massive knowledge? His intricate thoughts and high philosophies? The more he thought, the finer he saw himself. He was not a poet. He was a German metaphysician with a waddling behind. To think of Grovenka or the beggar made him jealous. He tried not to. Yet he was sure Grovenka had never read a poem. And for the beggar, reading was impossible. They were the same, she the legless and armless of Russia, and the beggar the Grovenka of China. He had to be taken this far away in order to see them. She was no longer disgusting to him; she was the dancing heart again, not quite so vulgar now. He wished her disgusting again. And he wished the beggar were only a stunned heifer, nothing more. "My charts will be important," he told himself in an attempt to break the mood, and saw in a future blur all mankind poring over them midst marveling phrases. "But she and the beggar will not be remembered, they will not have lived."

In the morning they passed through a chasm whose walls, suspended above the river, almost touched on top. Later, when the river broadened and slowed, Simpkoff imagined the walls falling in upon him, and after, only angular boulders detouring the river slightly, already worn and part of the track for the chanting goat-footed coolies. He reasoned backwards: he should not have gone down the Yangtze, nor have left Vladivostok, nor his town on the Black Sea, his mother's home. But he had been impelled, and this was a fate of some kind,

to define for the world the Szechwan Variation. And yet, in his own Russia, he had gone nowhere and seen nothing.

A little hut was burrowed into a cliff and stuck out from its ledge on bamboo poles. Simpkoff watched the figure of a man emerge and hoist himself to the top with a hanging rope. The man walked a small distance and then lowered himself with another rope to a bright-green platform no larger than a bath towel. There he began to pull up the greenness from his patch, moving cautiously so as not to be thrown from it. "He accepts the rule of nature," Simpkoff thought, and entered in his notebook, "What does a poem or a war matter to a man who accepts the rule of nature? He can easily bear with man."

Then the groves of golden and green bamboo, oranges, pomelos and fanning palms which appeared now around the deep-eaved houses on the tops of rocky spurs affirmed the obvious evidence of all man's efforts to outrule nature. The word "Man" itself meant these efforts.

But there was also sun here and the rolling clouds were sparse like lost puffs, so the groves shone as though man had never touched or known them, and they swayed Simpkoff into a desperate confusion in which there was no alternative but to accept the rule of nature. "'Man is a vision only, a dream, an assumption of poets," he wrote rapidly. Then his eye sighted another of those pale arc-objects drifting by. A raft bumped and sank it. It bobbled up right under him, puzzling material, spongy-soft, smooth. "A disbarked tree crook perhaps?" He began to write again, "There are unwholesome creatures on earth who fear and so lie and who think themselves . . ." The object was caught in the side-wheel and squashed. He began another sentence, "Their ego . . ." Then Simpkoff saw. It was a relic of war, a human arm, hand and all.

Not until the next afternoon was he able to resume writing in his Japanese notebook. Just below the unfinished sentence, "Their ego . . ." he tried describing the green squashings in the side-wheel. Many hours later he put down the word, *"Fini."* It was the only non-Japanese word in his entire notebook. Then, as the Jardine side-wheeler slipped through the motionless Yangtze, Simpkoff stood abjectly at its rail with his notebook, tearing off one sheet at a time and offering it in his open palm to the night's black breeze.

FREDERICK P. W. McDOWELL:

Robert Penn Warren's Criticism

I

The intellectual force and the spiritual excitement pervading Robert Penn Warren's poems and novels at their best also distinguish his criticism. It has, therefore, greater authority than a canon consisting of so few essays and reviews would ordinarily exert. One need not agree with Ezra Pound that the only valid critic is the creative artist to recognize how valuable, from all points of view, are the pronouncements of a gifted critic who is also a gifted poet and novelist. Warren's critical pieces, then, not only define his theory of literature and give insight into the writers he discusses but also provide an invaluable commentary upon his own poems and novels.

As critic, Warren reveals a sensibility, simultaneously active at the aesthetic and moral levels, which enables him to grasp the essential meaning of a writer and his often unexpressed purpose. Marked by unusual philosophical depth, by sympathy with literature as it reflects the spiritual life, and by aesthetic sensitivity, Warren's work has absorbed the positive innovations of "the new criticism" without being bound by a methodology. As humanist and aesthetician both, Warren senses the significance of literature as an art and of art as the most incisive means for comprehending naked reality. For its aperçus as well as for its marshalling of argument, Warren's criticism is discerning. Seeking to define in poetry and fiction deep-lying moral issues, Warren also infuses his criticism with moral passion. More flexible than the later Eliot, Warren agrees that the final sanction for literature is ethical despite the fact that it must initially conform to aesthetic canons. Working out of this wide context, the critic must not only be alive to the intellectual dilemmas of his own age but must, above all, see them against the "great modes of the mind," religion, philosophy, and art.

Central to an understanding of Warren as critic and imaginative writer is his exegesis of "The Ancient Mariner." More frankly than in any of his other studies, Warren here combines a formalist approach to art with an urgent sense of its moral relevance. Analyzing the symbols in the poem, Warren finds two major strands of meaning.

The first, that of the "One Life," is omnipresent in Warren's creative work. When it dawns, this sacramental vision of the universe rejects the original sin of pride and self-sufficiency and brings the sinner to union with the rest of creation in humility and selfless love. By embracing this sacramental reality, the Ancient Mariner achieves the same spiritual irradiation which also comes to the protagonists of Warren's fiction. In his own poetry, moreover, Warren broods upon the nightmare of life bereft of such vision. The second basic theme which Warren stresses in his reading of "The Ancient Mariner" is the "value-creating capacity" of the creative imagination, together with the disastrous results of its perverted use. This ambiguity, present by implication in all of Warren's original work, is explicitly dominant in *World Enough and Time*: Jeremiah Beaumont, initially misusing the creative imagination for his own selfish, criminal ends, attains final Grace for his tortured soul through its ministrating power. Sometimes, as with Lilburn Lewis in *Brother to Dragons,* the perverted imagination—a fanatical, self-righteous vision—is so powerful as to annul all promptings of its creative counterpart and to blur completely an individual's discriminations between good and evil.

The vigor and the originality of the Coleridge study lie in its cogent attempt to reach the ultimate meaning of "The Ancient Mariner" by considering all available clues. In this essay, Warren utilizes to productive ends the resources provided by modern scholarship and by the whole body of Coleridge's work itself. Through his references to Coleridge's prose, Warren conclusively defines the poem's sacramental theme, which, as he demonstrates, flows out of Coleridge's own haunting sense of original sin. Basing his discussion upon the inference to be drawn from the stanza in which the Mariner, for the first time, sees the beauty of the sinister water-snakes and then spontaneously blesses them, Warren maintains, as the central principle in his discussion, that there are two facets of the spirit explored in "The Ancient Mariner," the religious and the creative, and that in Coleridge's view they are inextricably intertwined.

Since Warren's central emphasis is upon Coleridge's concept of the basic unity of the mind, his own categorical separation of religious and aesthetic symbols in his exegesis of the poem is disturbing. Despite his cavils against the inflexibility of the allegorizing mind, Warren, at times, comes close to such inflexibility himself. One can accept, for example, as Warren does, the over-all beneficence of the moon in the poem without supporting his tenuous identification of moon-

light with the creative imagination. Granted that the symbolical richness of the poem could suggest this possibility, Warren's own formulation of the moon's significance is too explicit to be convincing —the moon is surely a symbol of the spirit in its fullness rather than of the spirit merely in its aesthetic aspects. In the same way, Warren too arbitrarily associates the Polar Spirit with the "creative imagination," whereas this presence in the poem is fundamentally a symbol of the Nemesis which tracks down the Mariner for his violation of the laws of God and nature. Furthermore, Warren too rigorously thinks of the sun as a malign agency. When the angelic spirits of the dead fly off to the sun, Warren rather fancifully interprets this as a sign of the fact that the sun must be "redeemed" before it can seemingly rejoice in the Mariner's regeneration.

Irrespective of these lapses into which Warren's need for consistency has betrayed him, the essay does revitalize Coleridge's poem and open new facets of meaning in it. In particular, the study is challenging for its discussion of the fellow-mariners as accomplices in the crime, for its indication of the significance of the various contrasts and repetitions in the poem, and for its interpretation of the hermit as a priest not only of God but of nature—especially in its aesthetic implications —and of society as well. Equally discerning is the suggestion that the revelations which occur in the dream or trance states in the poem represent the truths which are available only to the unconscious mind out of Time but which are indispensable to a completion of our conscious rational lives in Time. The fact, above all, that Warren has been able, through the analytical methods of the new criticism, to demonstrate with persuasiveness that "The Ancient Mariner" is concerned with original sin and with the dynamic quality of the creative imagination emphasizes both the philosophical cogency of the poem itself and some of the more striking aspects of his own thought.

II

Underlying his criticism is the same sense of modern man's psychic dislocation and spiritual fracture that haunts Warren's poetry and fiction. The integrity of poetry and the wholeness of man have both been threatened by our failure to go beyond the scientific to reassert the aesthetic and humanistic. The inner insecurity and spiritual impoverishment, wrought by obeisance to an abstract, quantitative measure of life, Warren decries not only in the characters of *All the King's*

Men, for example, or in poems like "Toward Rationality" ("We freeze from above downwards") but in the criticism as well. In its full realization of this "conflict which our age yet experiences and has made desperate efforts to resolve," Matthew Arnold's work, says Warren, has its chief relevance. The poetic sensibility, Arnold realized, had to struggle for independent expression against hostile forces like a vigorous industrialism, an arid scientism, and a complacent liberalism in politics. That this same protest against the pervasive logical intellect was crystallized early in Warren's career is indicated by his association with Ransom and the Nashville group. His loyalty to their ideals is seen not only in his having contributed to *I'll Take My Stand,* but in "John Crowe Ransom: A Study in Irony," 1935. Herein Warren strongly supports Ransom's earlier quarrel with the naturalism of the modern age, a naturalism which reverences a God without thunder, a God who is predictably benevolent, and a God whose essence can be precisely defined by the intellect. Rejecting this pallid deity, Warren agrees with Ransom that God is, in reality, inscrutable, that His nature is unpredictable, and that His essence transcends all rationalist attempts to apprehend it. The violence at the heart of Warren's own creative work challenges this flatness of the modern mind, its aversion to the spiritually elusive, and its lack of vital principle. Tensions which explode in violence are more positive, if less "civilized," than a debilitating empiricism. Without sensitivity to the soul-provoking terror which modern science has done its best to obliterate, life is stale and empty. A conviction that primitive violence is more meaningful than timid conformity to convention leads Warren to scorn, in *Brother to Dragons,* the individual of "the pious mind" for whom "our history's nothing if not refined."

To permit modern man to recapture his lost plenitude, to heal the split in his nature between intellect and spirit, the sensibility must become morally as well as aesthetically responsive, Warren declares. Its chief function will be to permeate the unimaginative rationalism of the modern mind to make of it an informed, right reason. In an essay on Hemingway, Warren shows how difficult it is for post-Renaissance man to adjust spiritually to a world which all too often dismisses the workings of the sensibility as irrelevant. In Warren's view, Hemingway himself is a challenging writer because he has, despite our discouraging situation, proclaimed the integrity of the spirit. Almost neurotically sensitive to the intangible values which science tends to nullify, Hemingway, though theologically

unconcerned, creates within a religious framework. *A Farewell to Arms* is a religious book, not through any doctrinal resolution of the modern problem but through exploration of it by the independent sensibility as the most active agent of the synthesizing imagination.

If Warren too simply discusses in religious terms a book whose tone is predominantly secular, he rightly divines that man's general sense of spiritual deprivation in the modern world has religious implications and that Hemingway, throughout his work, has been much concerned with them. In tracing the path from Darwin to Nada, Warren is a bit too expeditious and seems unaware of some of the subtleties in the writers he cites: was the universe, in the end, really friendly for Tennyson and Arnold, as Warren asserts, or did the withdrawn Thomas Hardy ever really have "faith in the constructive power of the secret community"? But Warren's realization that these writers anticipated Hemingway in feeling that the spirit is no longer inviolable in "the God-abandoned world of modernity" is the important perception. Despite its oversimplification, Warren's quasi-historic approach does point up the significance of Hemingway's fiction by showing how inevitably it has been, in part, the result of the far-ranging spiritual conflicts of the last hundred years. The judgments of Hemingway's ideas, his primitivism, his style, and his highly complex irony gather amplitude and authority through Warren's intense conviction that, after all, these are matters not only of literary interest but also of pressing human concern. Another of Warren's central insights is his appreciation of the paradox that Hemingway's anti-intellectualism is philosophical, just as we might say that Warren's own intellectualism stresses insistently the irrational and the contingent in human experience. To Warren, Hemingway continues the protest, implicit in Romanticism, against deadening institutions and the weight of empiric fact, at the same time that he also encourages, like the romantics, the individual's effort to realize ideal human values. If Warren's own ideas are in this sense romanticist, he is also severely critical, in the Coleridge study and elsewhere, of the self-centered idealism which all too often characterizes an uncritically accepted Romanticism. From the best of Warren's essays, we come to realize how fully the philosophical tensions of the last century have contributed to the formation of the philosophy underlying both his criticism and his work as creative artist.

In breaching the dissociation between emotion and intellect, between poetry and science, Warren attests, in his study of Coleridge, to the

dynamic role of the imagination. The concentration involved in the aesthetic ordering of experience has infinitely more cogency, Warren contends, than the abstractly rendered precept. The factual prose of the intellect is simply a less complete expression than the figurative language of the sensibility. Conscious efforts by creative artists to unite thought and feeling become, therefore, the counterpart to those of modern man to regain fullness of soul. Art can be, in fact, of supreme value to the soulless society which too often disregards it.

Because a naturalistic world-view is now so pervasive, Warren realizes that any valid definition of ultimate reality must be reached partly in accord with its tenets. Although modern man stands to lose his dignity by uncritically adopting this world-view, it has nevertheless permanently changed his ideas of the natural, the human, and the supernatural. Naturalism, then, cannot be ignored, but without positive vision it distorts reality. Warren acknowledges in his essay on *Nostromo* that man has his life in nature and must come to terms with it, but must, under no circumstances, as a responsible, ethical being, submit to its domination. Warren's own poems and novels have been motivated, in large part, by this awareness that man is simultaneously in nature and above it: those who reject the natural facts will follow a one-sided idealism whereas those who immerse themselves unreflectively in nature will lose all sense of "the human community."

Despite the fact that naturalism has challenged for most intellectuals the absolute credibility of revealed religion, the spiritual values and symbolism inherent in Christianity are so meaningful, Warren feels, that they must not only be preserved but reasserted. Although Warren has never explicitly professed the Christian theology, his philosophy, is, in the broad sense, doctrinally Christian. If he has asserted the values of a radical Christianity without insisting literally upon its theology, he at least seems conscious of what he has done, unlike so many nineteenth-century intellectuals who ostensibly broke with a traditional Christianity only to absorb uncritically its idealistic ethic. Warren, it appears, is at this point consciously satisfied with Christianity considered as a dynamic metaphor for the interpretation of human experience; and he implies that the question of literal belief in Christian dogma is almost beside the point if one has this more basic sense of the moral relevance of Christian concepts to our lives in history.

Warren's work is unified by its obsessive Christian sense of man's

fallen condition: man's sense of glory has been obscured by his guilt, his aspiration has been broken by the "inward sore of self that cankers at the bone," and his assertive pride has been belied by his insufficiency. In modern times hostile pressures like the rationalism of the Enlightenment, the exaggerated individualism and utopianism of the Romantic Movement, and the deterministic science of the nineteenth century have all diluted a radical Christianity and dimmed the light of the spirit. The result has been an inner hollowness which paralyzes. With its concern for his temporal welfare, "liberalism" in politics and religion has both minimized the need man might otherwise have felt to attain this spiritual salvation and encouraged his self-aggrandizement, his achieving an infinite degree of perfectibility by sheer assertion of the will.

The Christian view, as Warren defines it in his study of Coleridge, is neither materialistic nor prideful. It insists that man is not absolute, that an inscrutable God exists on a spiritual plane apart from the human, that sinful man needs to be converted and reborn, and that man's salvation must be earned, negatively through contrition and positively through love. To recall man to his religious heritage, to a sense of his betrayal by "modernism," to a need for humility and spiritual restoration has thus been Warren's urgent mission. Even if traditional Christianity does not, in all respects, encompass the enigma of life, there is no other religion so viable. Despite its having been forced to the defensive, this view of life—impressing upon man a sense of his limitations but encouraging him to thirst always after righteousness and eternal truth—still means the most. It has stressed, in particular, Warren asserts in "Knowledge and the Image of Man," his most recent essay in *The Sewanee Review,* the sacred right of each individual to determine, within the limits imposed by his fallen nature, his own spiritual destiny, to arrive at "self-definition for good or evil, salvation or damnation." Warren's impassioned assertion of Christian values has made him impatient, therefore, with a criticism which treats abstractly of technical questions to the exclusion of the philosophical, and has imbued his own essays with exceptional earnestness.

III

Though Warren was nurtured in "the new criticism" and helped define that movement through his collaborations with Cleanth Brooks, he is actually more a moralist than a formalist. Convinced that litera-

ture and life are closely related, he goes beyond aesthetic analysis, although he starts with the literary text. To Warren, what the artist has drawn from his experience means more than the methods he has used to encompass it. In the essay on *Nostromo,* Warren agrees with Conrad that "the impartial practice of life" rather than "this or that particular method of technique or conception" moves the artist to creation. Warren goes on to say that literature exists to convey the deepest truth, to come at "the meaning of experience." The "philosophical" writer, the most vital kind to us, constantly attempts to reach "the level of generalization about values." Such a writer's presentation of his values is often oblique and indirect, to the annoyance of the literal-minded reader. But meaningful values of the sort defined in great literature, even if sometimes intangible, alone can sanction an ordered life—they comprise for man "the mark of his human achievement," and in the end, they are "his only truth." Thus Warren in his study of Coleridge has to reject as too constricting the contention of Lowes that "The Ancient Mariner" is mere poetic "illusion" and that its philosophical import is negligible. There is also enlivening substance in the poem, since through its symbols it reaches inward, as every serious poem must, to the artist's most ardent convictions and reflects unerringly his knowledge of life. In these late studies of Conrad and Coleridge, Warren actually reveals, at a more sophisticated level, that same impatience with matters of "mere" technique which had in the early thirties dominated the work of the neo-humanists. Yet Warren, along with other "new critics," had rebelled against the inflexible moralism of these writers.

Warren's essays and reviews in the 1930's dealt principally with poets and reveal an essentially formalist approach to literature. When he did write about the novel, he seemed as interested in technical questions as in the novelist's ordering of values. Later, when Warren, through fiction, attempted a large-scale definition of his own philosophy, as critic he became increasingly preoccupied with the novel and with the moral dynamics, in general, of literature. Warren's earlier, aesthetically oriented utterances are, however, consistent with his later criticism, since he has not so much supplanted earlier attitudes as supplemented them with a fuller statement of other ideas which, indeed, had often been present by implication in the earlier essays. It is to be regretted that, in light of his full development as critic, Warren has never expanded some of his earlier incidental remarks upon Frost, Auden, MacLeish, Jeffers, Cummings, and Hart Crane

into full-length studies of the sort that he has given us for Coleridge and some of the novelists.

Warren's modulation of his formalist emphasis came about midway in his career and is strikingly illustrated in an essay on Melville's poetry. With perhaps too much alacrity, Warren dismisses those judgments of Melville which stress his technical infelicity as poet. They are largely irrelevant, Warren feels, in view of the magnitude and difficulty of the experience Melville tried to master. Since he dealt with the elemental and the impalpable, his failure is actually of more moment than the too easy technical successes of many of his contemporaries.

Because the great poem reflects his deep concern with basic human situations, the writer must necessarily be socially conscious, abjuring all impulses binding him to the ivory tower of mere aesthetic reverie and of mere zest in manipulating his technique. Indicative of how thoroughly Warren's literary theory was imbued with Christian principle is his contention that an unbridled individualism at the creative level is as much to be eschewed as that individualism at the moral level, which, secure in its intrinsic rightness, rejects till too late all responsibilities toward other men. Intensely alive in his poetry and fiction, therefore, to the stultifying effects of spiritual isolation, Warren appropriately insists, in a review of *Princeton Verse between Two Wars: An Anthology,* that the writer and the professor must not work in a vacuum, but must be responsible members of society. An abiding concern for it ought to underlie their work, whereas society in its turn must be made conscious of life-inspiriting art and scholarship. That literature is social even in its inception, Warren incidentally asserts in an omnibus review of fiction, 1936: the writer must assiduously inspect the aims of the civilization which forms him and ponder its problems. In his essay on Eudora Welty, Warren implies that an artist can scarcely escape becoming a social force: existing to intensify our awareness of the world and to define our relations to it in terms of his philosophy, he cannot help influencing, at least indirectly, our conceptions of society. Yet, unlike many of the socially oriented critics of the twenties and the thirties, Warren would not, despite his moralist's zeal, permit the integrity of literature to be compromised. He flatly states, in an editorial for *The Southern Review,* 1941, that the absolute worth of a literary work bears little direct relationship to any one reader's specific convictions about ethics, politics, and philosophy and is to be measured, rather, in terms of more disinter-

ested, universal standards. Yet literature is intimately concerned with ethics, politics, and philosophy through the writer's conscientious intelligence working upon them, and he must, accordingly, be sensitive to the thought-currents of his age. To realize the full purport of a poem, one must see that its social and moral values are organic rather than imposed upon it from without. Paradoxically, that writer is most socially astute who is most true to his own vision, as Warren himself endeavored to be, for example, in his presentation of partisan political issues in *All the King's Men*. All told, Warren, precisely because of his acutely developed sensibility, possesses a surer grasp of the sociological implications of literature and a more comprehensive moral outlook than does a social critic of literature like Edmund Wilson, who is more overtly concerned with an author's "philosophy" than Warren allows himself to be.

The values and ideas in literature, Warren tells us in his study of Coleridge, are ultimately defined by perspectives intrinsic to the artist's mind, rather than by perspectives extrinsic to it. The artist's sense of the fact, his harmonizing it with other incidental facts, his subduing it to his inner vision, his transforming it through this vision to a more vital reality count for more than its objective accuracy. Perspectives extrinsic to the artist as craftsman—those of philosophy, politics, economics, psychology, history, and science—provide materials for his shaping imagination, but by themselves they either lack emotional relevance or possess only the one-sided relevance of propaganda. These perspectives, if uncritically resorted to by the writer, will subvert the aesthetic identity of his creations to alien, interested ends. If, on the other hand, he is excited by these materials to achieve for them an appropriate form, he will have ensured their independent aesthetic identity.

With this concept as his standard, Warren judged the work of T. S. Stribling in an essay more important for its partial enunciation of Warren's aesthetic than for its subject. As Stribling's chief fault, Warren notes his tendency to resort to the extrinsic to gain authority for the values that ought, without too explicit formulation, to have inhered from the beginning in the form and texture of the novels themselves. In them, Stribling fails to define his thesis because he is overzealous in abstractly proving it, with the result that he is unable to get close to his material. For an artistic embodiment of value, Stribling's work is not disinterested enough. Warren also establishes in this essay the firm connection between intellectual quality

in a writer and his finished work, and concludes that a residual crudity in Stribling's mind, despite its force, prevents a definitive utterance in literary art. Because his nature is deep enough to objectify his experience, Faulkner is more firmly the artist, Warren states, than Stribling, who fails to render plausible an act or idea in a specific context. Eudora Welty's mind is also far more subtle than Stribling's, with the result that in her work she transmutes the facts of experience into art through the intensity of her inner vision. In his essay on her, Warren assures us that Miss Welty's fiction furnishes the implicit comment rather than the document, the "thing made" rather than the report, the animating idea rather than purely factual history.

Though idea is anterior to the fable which suggests its structure, the literary work, Warren thus contends, attains its insights and conveys its realities through form. General ideas in literature can only be defined in terms of the aesthetic fabric they contribute to, at the same time that form itself becomes an active moral agent in its own right. In "Knowledge and the Image of Man" Warren concludes that knowledge of form, in the end, represents our only valid knowledge, but form only as it is ultimately rooted in the facts of experience:

> The form is a vision of experience, but of experience fulfilled and redeemed in knowledge, the ugly with the beautiful, the slayer with the slain, what was known as shape now known as time, what was known in time now known as shape, a new knowledge. It is not a thing detached from the world but a thing springing from the deep engagement of spirit with the world. . . . The form is the flowering of that deep engagement of spirit, the discovery of its rhythm.

Believing so intently, then, in the moral efficacy of form, Warren therefore rejects as inadequate the belletristic interpretation of "The Ancient Mariner," while he simultaneously holds that only through aesthetic means can we discern the wider reaches of literature. Warren accordingly declares in a review of Faulkner's *The Hamlet* that the total structure of the book bears not only upon our aesthetic evaluation of it but also upon our completest moral knowledge of it.

Without a sense for form and its temperamental requisites, intellectual discipline and self-control, an artist cannot reach true distinction. Because Thomas Wolfe lacked a coherent philosophy and because he naively exploited his own ego, his novels disappoint both artistically and philosophically, Warren feels. In particular, they lack the objectivity and the dramatic sense to focus their materials steadily. A well-

defined and powerful fable would have generated its own befitting form and met the demands of structure in the novel, but Wolfe lacked the spiritual stamina to envisage a "'correlative" for his inner torment. Even when subjective intensities are less flamboyant than Wolfe's, they are no substitute for intellectual poise. In his essay on Wolfe, Warren has thus definitively summed up this novelist's artistic inadequacies without losing sight of the energizing quality of his sensibility and the merits of the objectively rendered parts of his fiction.

A value, directly presented, is not therefore adequately crystallized: it must preferably be projected in terms of the concrete, of the vivifying symbol. The most complete significance from literature will be elicited, in Warren's opinion, from concentrating upon the most elusive aspect of its form: its symbols and how they interact upon one another to suggest dynamic chains of meaning. To justify his approach to "The Ancient Mariner," he accordingly affirms Coleridge's dictum that through the symbol we reach spiritual revelation—in its comprehensiveness it expresses inevitably the creative imagination, whereas allegory expresses, with its pallid abstractions, the understanding. Warren then quotes Coleridge to show how the symbol unifies the dissonances of experience, and how, in particular, it yokes the philosophical to the specific—through the symbol we have "a translucence of the special in the individual, or of the general in the special, or of the universal in the general; above all . . . the translucence of the eternal through and in the temporal." In appropriating romantic theory to justify his own intense yet intellectualist practice in poetry, Warren enthusiastically accepts Coleridge's view that the visible world is emblematic of the invisible, that the objects of the sense are symbolic of metaphysical, spiritual facts. In other words, the symbol combines the poet's heart and his intellect, and in Warren's words "affirms the unity of mind in the welter of experience."

Another of Coleridge's tenets Warren agrees with is the doctrine of organic form, a doctrine which emphasizes Warren's continued respect for the integrity of literature. At his most explicit in this respect in his discussion of Eudora Welty, he opposes Diana Trilling for having criticized Miss Welty's "obscurity" without fully understanding her purpose. Mrs. Trilling is misled, Warren feels, because she is apparently arguing from some abstract definition of a story, "some formalistic conception which does not accommodate the present exhibit," and is disregarding the only legitimate end of literature, the increase of our awareness of life by any means the artist chooses to

use. Requiring the artist to conform to the critic's abstract specifications for a literary genre is pernicious if thereby a situation or character in the individual specimen of that genre is not fully evoked—adherence to such a view results, too, in a false standard for criticism. Since each new work of art is *ipso facto* a special creation, it is likely because of its vitality to strain at the leash of any such rigidly defined specifications and, in some degree, to break away from them. Not only does each work unfold uniquely, but all its details are shaped by this God-given uniqueness.

Warren also considers the work of other writers, notably of Katherine Anne Porter, in the light of this concept of organic form. In order to establish a definite tonal unity, a story by Katherine Anne Porter, Warren maintains, will progressively both amplify and refine its themes, and will reject as irrelevant ornament those devices of style which do not contribute to intrinsic effect. To attain such independent identity for each of his works, the artist must coalesce breadth of conception with precision of detail. At both the technical and thematic levels, part and whole, as in Miss Porter's stories, must be inextricably intertwined—each work of art must "test its thematic line at every point against its total circumstantiality." Furthermore, the technical and the thematic must reinforce one another at every point. Using these same ideas to judge Mark Van Doren's poetry, Warren finds that argument in it is too easily isolated from aesthetic context, and that, conversely, image is too easily separable from theme. Van Doren's poetry lacks the indissoluble texture provided by a merging of form with theme and thus, in Warren's view, falls short of greatness. Similarly, in "Conquistador" extraneous rhetorical devices clog the epic mode of MacLeish's style instead of determining its texture.

When symbolical identity has been conferred upon values or "ideas" —by idea Warren means thematic content and not an ideology—they can organize a work of art. When they have thus become integral to the poem, ideas neither ought to be excluded (as literary purists would argue), nor need they be embraced only for their surface meaning (as propagandists would urge). This relation of "idea" to the total configuration of the poem Warren discusses in "Pure and Impure Poetry," an essay which suggests how the most intense aesthetic effects often derive from ranges of experience which superficially seem to have the least to do with producing such effects. If ideas are fully absorbed into the poem, they participate actively in it and provide

for it, by their interplay, a structure. Even from the standpoint of form, then, ideas are vital to a poem despite what the purists say. In promoting the most intense emotional pleasure a great work of art subdues recalcitrant impulses to a total aesthetic pattern. Conversely, by the tensions they generate and by sheer contrast with other less obtrusive elements, these "impurities" impart an added depth. The resistance overcome, the complexity mastered and given its inevitable form is preferable in art to a fragile beauty without substance: "Other things being equal, the greatness of a poet depends upon the extent of experience which he can master poetically." In this essay Warren asserts that even a chemical formula "might appear functionally in a poem," whereas in "John Crowe Ransom: A Study in Irony," 1935, he thought Wordsworth naive for assuming that science might become meaningful enough, in human terms, to serve the emotional intensities of poetry. This side of Warren's theory accounts for much that is distinctive in his poetry: its terse, tortured intellectuality and its complexities, which are sometimes ineffective through failing to be incorporated completely into a given poem. Warren's mental abundance is perhaps even better illustrated in his later novels. Their growing philosophical force and density can be ascribed to the political, metaphysical, and moral "impurities" Warren has been able to absorb without violation of governing aesthetic precept.

Although such unifying intelligence informs artistic creation at its highest pitch, paradoxically the irrationalist formulations of myth, Warren infers, render values and ideas most immediately available to society, a concept he stresses in his work upon Coleridge, Hemingway, and Faulkner. The active intelligence must always be conscious, therefore, of the irrationalist ultimates that can alone guide it faithfully. That Warren agrees with Ransom as to the artist's need for myth can be seen in a review of Herbert Gorman's *Nathaniel Hawthorne: A Study in Solitude,* written in 1928, three years before *God without Thunder* was published. Hawthorne, in contrast to Frost and especially to Sherwood Anderson, still stood in a satisfying, if tenuous, relation to a moral and religious orthodoxy, which, if narrow and cheerless, had enough traditional sanction to enrich it with the spaciousness of myth. As such, it became a suggestive perspective against which Hawthorne could bring to maturity and coherence his own immediate, more constricted experience. As Warren phrases it in the Foreword to *Brother to Dragons,* Hawthorne was instinctively conscious of history as "the big myth we live," and of poetry or litera-

ture as "the little myth we make" within its larger frame. The religious and moral nexus out of which he wrote—he was in one sense its last spokesman—and the productive myth he actualized in his fiction suggest the degree to which too many modern writers fall short of Hawthorne's vision. In the spiritually divided post-Renaissance period, moreover, such allegiances to the archetypal as do exist are frequently spurious, so that Warren's own approach to myth in his novels and his criticism has had to be as often critical as zealous. In *World Enough and Time,* for example, the myth of the Fall, at least by implication, is the informing center of the book, while certain myths deriving from Romanticism—those of the conquering hero, of the spiritual affinity between death and love, of the resplendent pioneer vision of the West, of the eternal return, and so on—wither under Warren's ironic scrutiny because of the varying degrees of falsity in them.

The complex of ideas generating coherence in a work of art Warren calls "theme," which he contrasts with "subject" in a 1936 essay on the novel, "Literature as a Symptom." Whereas a writer's theme organizes, energizes, and elicits final meaning from his creative impulse, his subject enables him to objectify this theme, to dramatize it, and to domesticate it to his own experience. Theme underlies and bestows definitive form upon the particular occasion or subject which embodies it. Although theme, as Warren uses the term, is to be distinguished from a disembodied abstraction—the latter invariably found in propaganda—theme can approach such colorless statement when it has not been entirely absorbed into the concrete. Conversely, subject can become uninspired transcription, a pedestrian realism, unless it be modulated to the deeper urgency of theme. The transmuting of subject to the spaciousness of theme and the symbolic unfolding of theme in an apposite subject is only possible in the creative heat of a unified sensibility which fuses logical intelligence with intense emotion.

IV

Basic to Warren's theory of criticism is his conviction that meaning in literature is richly diverse. For one thing, the complexity of the psychology which, in general, underlies literature would presuppose that in literature itself—a highly stylized rendition of experience—a still greater complexity would prevail. For deep-lying human issues, a simple analysis would be untrue to the facts, if not pernicious. In his essay on Katherine Anne Porter, Warren remarks how a paradox of motives underlies any passion and how this tissue of contradiction

permits only tentative resolutions to inner conflict. The moral possibilities of human action, the claims of our disparate impulses, and the intricacies of defining the intangible imply that literature has manifold meaning. As in life the options for conduct are multiple and the nuances of psychology infinite, so in the criticism of a literature truly reflecting life discriminations in value can only be made in the light of these complexities and not according to formula.

Throughout his criticism Warren holds that truth resides in fusing partial perceptions, in discriminating among the ambiguities of existence, in recognizing that intense joy, for instance, has for lurking counterpart intense despair, Warren's theme in "Picnic Remembered." Since, in Warren's view, a stirring poem welds together through the artist's moral passion the disparate facets of his mind, it is not surprising that in his own poetic practice he has been most responsive to the metaphysical poets who were fascinated by the incongruous. In such literature, the opposite impulsions of experience are reconciled, says Warren, through dialectic or through interplay among the symbols used to represent them. Granted that a partial view, if recognized as such, provides invaluable insights, it can become sinister when it arrogates to itself the whole truth. The "education" of Warren's fictional protagonists, for example, occurs when they reject such one-sided interpretations of life for more sophisticated, integral ones. The modern age, in general, has been too one-sided in making a fetish of scientific rationalism and then regarding it as the sole source for value. As long, however, as the logical intellect is aware of its opposite, ceremonial tradition with its instinctive usages, Warren does believe that its discriminations are valid. Their enlightened intellects thus impel Eudora Welty and Katherine Anne Porter, Warren maintains, to assimilate rival concepts to the total configuration of life and to draw from each such concept, without distortion, its meaning. The polarities in life can never be entirely accommodated to one another, since no standard resolution of them is possible. Yet the serious individual, Warren asserts in his essay on *Nostromo,* must persist in these exertions, if he is to discover the secret of his experience:

> Man, however, is committed to action. The Heysts, who repudiate action, find their own kind of damnation. Wisdom, then, is the recognition of man's condition, the condition of the creature made without gills or fins but dropped into the sea, the necessity of living with the ever-renewing dilemma of idea as opposed to nature, morality to action, "utopianism" to "secular logic" . . . , justice to material interests. Man must make his life somehow in

> the dialectical process of these terms, and in so far as he is to achieve redemption he must do so through an awareness of his condition that identifies him with the general human communion, not in abstraction, not in mere doctrine, but immediately.

In thus bridging through symbol such impulsions as "the dream and the world, the idea and nature, innocence and experience, individuality and the anonymous, devouring life-flux, meaning and force, love and knowledge," Miss Welty's fiction, like Conrad's, possesses depth, Warren declares. It also emphasizes the fact that only within the limits of such harmonized forces is significant effort possible, whereas action emanating from any one of these forces in isolation is misguided. In short, the serious endeavor to resolve the disparities of life will culminate in a rich harmony between God and man and between nature and society, as Warren points out in his critiques of "The Ancient Mariner" and of Melville's poetry. Melville's chief claim as poet to modern critical notice, Warren asserts, is precisely this almost obsessive preoccupation with the "dualities and dubieties" of life to arrive at a more perfect knowledge of God and man. Just this sensitivity to the equivocal in conduct and consciousness distinguishes Warren's essays on modern novelists, as it accounts, too, for the dense entanglements of his fictional characters.

In his account of "The Ancient Mariner" Warren assumes that this thematic richness is vitally present on several levels:

> Any substantial work will operate at more than one thematic level, and this is what makes it so difficult to define the theme of a profound creation; the root-idea will have many possible formulations and many of them will appear, or be suggested, in the work.

Warren also cites Coleridge's definition of the imagination as a diversity within unity to argue that the literature it inspires must be allusive. For this reason Warren has rejected, as we have seen, theories of pure poetry because they sin against its integrity even while they proclaim it—"impure" elements in the poetry signify in actuality an increased depth, fullness, and variety. Reviewing Rolfe Humphries' poems, Warren urges that the only admissible "purity" in literature stems from the conquest, not the rejection, of complication. Even all good minor poems will possess inherent complexities despite any apparent surface simplicity.

Aware that some ranges of its meaning may be elusive, the critic of literature will do as Warren himself has done in "A Poem of Pure

Imagination: An Experiment in Reading," his study of Coleridge: he will elicit its most valid interpretation through careful analysis of the text. If men in the past have missed certain inferences in a great work, the reason is that its meaning only gradually reveals itself. Unless our response to a poem is to be rudimentary, extensive criticism of it can alone prepare us for the full aesthetic experience. Until he has composed his poem, the poet himself does not know its meaning, and often he knows it only imperfectly afterwards. The poem becomes for the poet "a process of discovery which objectifies itself as a making" —the poet, the discoverer and explorer, cannot always, however, chart his discoveries and explorations. That this is true can be seen in the frequent discrepancy between his expressed intention—which cannot, however, be disregarded in criticism—and his finished poem. This discrepancy the critic will resolve through his dispassionate yet sympathetic insight. But since all levels of meaning cannot be immediately determined, since, in fact, the scope of the great poem broadens with time, the critic's task is endless. "And for the greater works we are never fully ready. That is why criticism is a never-ending process."

In this same essay, Warren asserts that the symbols of literature challenge the critic most sharply. A symbol is not arbitrary but carries the freight of many perspectives, which can be defined partly in terms of the poet's implied attitudes and partly in terms of their relation to the other symbols he uses. The symbol gathers this massive quality, Warren says, either through necessity—the being implicated in "the great appearances of Nature"—or through congruence—the being validated by the artist's use of it in a special context. The critic will soon sense the fact that the meaning of a symbol is elusive. No one-for-one correspondence exists between symbol and abstraction as in the case of allegory. This indefiniteness of meaning may tempt the critic to dismiss casually the symbolic components of literature unless he also remembers that "the symbol has a deeper relation to the total structure of meaning than its mechanical place in plot, situation, or discourse." The symbols in a poem yield fresh significance to ever closer scrutiny by the critic; all that is in a poem may be grasped intuitively, but it can never all be reduced to rational statement. All criticism fails, then, to the degree that logical analysis cannot duplicate the poem, to the degree that "the discursive activity cannot render the symbolical." Yet through his tenacity, through his ever more precise apprehension of its details and symbols, the critic comes always closer to a complete rendition of our intuition of the poem.

Warren's own reading of the symbols in "The Ancient Mariner" is, as we have seen, suggestive at the same time that it tends to be a bit contrived. When, however, he skilfully unwinds the tangled threads of Miss Welty's symbols in his analysis of complex tales like "A Still Moment," "The Wide Net," and "At the Landing," he reveals most fully those qualities which account for his stature as a critic: a flexible mind, a discriminative morality, and a sure grasp of the significance of a writer's complete work.

Like the artist in shaping the poem, the critic, in comprehending it, will find internal perspectives most salient. He will, at all costs, heed the intrinsic consistency of the poem, for it alone determines, as we have seen, the authentic ordering of value through form. Purport, for the critic, is not to be fixed in terms of perspectives external to the literary work, since they tend to distort the creative process and to reduce interpretation to a paraphrasable content. Yet, though extrinsic perspectives cannot in themselves explain a poem, the critic may often resort to them to enrich its intrinsic meaning as that is defined in its structure. Among those studies which provide invaluable hints for the critic's interpretations are "the intellectual, the spiritual climate of the age in which the poem was composed . . . the over-all pattern of other artistic work by the author in question . . . the thought of the author as available from the nonartistic sources . . . the facts of the author's life." Notwithstanding its ultimate sanction in the sensibility, criticism is, in large part, rational and utilizes to the full the resources of the intellect and of our culture. More than they once were, Brooks and Warren, in the 1950 edition of *Understanding Poetry,* are alive to the historical background of a poem and to the total contours of an author's work. Despite his preoccupation with the individual text, Warren in his criticism always heeds the corpus of the writer's work as well. In his essay on Hemingway, for example, Warren professes that, with a writer who develops, criticism must scrutinize his whole achievement—his methods and values as they mold all his books.

V

In manipulating the dissidences of experience and in providing the detachment which the artist needs to make his discriminations, the ironical or skeptical temper is, in Warren's view, indispensable. A good poem, he points out in "Pure and Impure Poetry," survives the fires of ironic scrutiny, because the mastered impurities within the

poem, reflecting the discords of actuality, confer toughness of texture upon it. Simplicities in poetry must be earned, and must be able to withstand what Richards had termed "an ironic contemplation": a great poem is by nature so involved that it contains its own systemic ironies. As Brooks and Warren assert in *Understanding Fiction,* irony both draws out latent details of the conflicts present in the artist's material and makes it safe from his own possible partisan bias. By its encouraging our sure insight into the complexities of life without letting us be seduced by any one of them, a protean irony is strategic for the writing of philosophical fiction, as Warren himself has demonstrated in such intricately conceived novels as *All the King's Men* and *World Enough and Time.*

Precisely this use of an operative irony to define the latent contradictions of our experience accounts for the distinction of Katherine Anne Porter's short stories, Warren maintains. This method is at its most brilliant in "Old Mortality," in which a centrifugal irony comments upon contrasted generations. That an ironic aloofness may be the paradoxical result of moral fervor, Warren stresses in "John Crowe Ransom: A Study in Irony." In this essay Warren asserts that Ransom's detachment springs from his desire to present our discouraging situation honestly and to inculcate thereby the need for a more positive morality than now seems possible.

The insistent presence of this tension between a deeply felt morality and the need to see things truthfully—especially as they fall short of the standards such a morality prescribes—together with the resolving of this tension by means of an intellectually active irony, is the most striking aspect of Warren's own critical approach. An actively discriminative ethical sense supplements Warren's open-minded skepticism so that only in its more obvious aspects is his criticism as detached and tolerant as it seems to be. Warren's compulsive need to find the truth at all costs and his conviction that it is not likely to inhere in any one dogma means that he is both arduous and subtle in defining the temper and the values of the individual writer he may be criticizing. Just as he envisages the creative writer of stature as being aware of the fact that truth lies midway between contrasting polarities, so Warren in his own criticism works from a firm center of aesthetic and ethical reference. Accordingly, he neither rejects all principles nor serves set principles blindly.

Warren agrees with Blackmur that the only valid sort of criticism encourages flexibility and adaptiveness of mind, and a ranging intelli-

gence. Accordingly, it recognizes the virtues of all legitimate approaches while it is suspicious of any one which pretends to absolute authority. Warren was, for instance, as expressed in a 1936 essay on Mrs. Gerould, skeptical of the uninformed "socio-economico-pathologico-Marxist method of criticism" current in the thirties, not because it lacked valuable insights but because its practitioners were intolerantly assured of its rightness. Rather the critic's intelligence must be persistent, flexible, and sophisticated to resist the pressure of provincial ideologies, to assert its basic integrity, and to reach befitting finalities of definition.

In his own critical essays, Warren reveals the great virtues and the incidental defects of this skeptical and ironical bias. It works best in discussing writers like Conrad whose books explore the complex ramifications of the impact of reality upon illusion. Warren's own subtlety of mind allows him, therefore, to penetrate convincingly to the depths of Conrad's subtle intelligence and to appreciate in *Nostromo* the "chromatic scale of attitudes" towards the role of illusion in life, as this is represented by the various characters in the book from Nostromo himself, who idealizes vanity only, to Emilia Gould, who feels a binding obligation to "the human community." As in some of Warren's other critical pieces, the leading ideas in his discussion of Conrad seem more incisive than the readings of individual passages. It is doubtful, for example, whether Stein in *Lord Jim* wishes the "destructive element"—the sea or dream into which a man is born—to symbolize the fact that productive illusion can either nourish or overwhelm. Rather, this metaphor could more simply signify that life itself, though dreamlike, requires an active exertion of the will and a recognition of the fruits of experience to arrive at a tenable idealism. If Warren is overingenious here, he is acute in his interpretation of the "material interests" theme in *Nostromo.* Although he agrees with some other Conrad critics that the silver mine is a corrupting force, Warren also argues that the mine has increased the prosperity of Sulaco and that it could become a powerfully regenerative influence socially, if it were to be controlled by men actuated not by petty material motives but by the selfless idea. Warren has, moreover, perspicuously defined what is undoubtedly Conrad's chief theme: the need for spiritual redemption and the difficulties involved in earning faith in the vitalized idea. Warren's detached, discursive method is admirably suited to an imaginative reconstruction of a writer's whole universe at the same time that it encourages a slightly relaxed attitude which may not always apprehend the terror lurking below the surface of the ostensible facts.

Warren is inclined, therefore, to accept Conrad's professed idealism without recognizing fully the strongly corrosive effects of his temperamental skepticism upon the intellectual expression of his values. Warren's ironical temper in criticism also causes him to underrate the aesthetically plain in literature, a poetry like Matthew Arnold's, for example, from which complication is apparently lacking and which deals in a diffuse, sparse, yet intense manner with philosophical abstractions.

Warren's centrality of vision also results in a perceptive summary of the characteristic features of William Faulkner's work. This treatment of Faulkner is marked by the same inclusiveness that had characterized the remarks on Conrad, but it lacks the focus that concentrating upon one novel had provided for the Conrad essay. Warren's observations upon Faulkner in 1946 were of a pioneering sort, and some of them have since become the truisms of Faulkner criticism: Faulkner's sense of the past, for example, as a repository for spiritual values no longer applicable without strain to life in the modern world, or his use of the Negro as a symbol to indicate the white man's guilt for having countenanced the corrupting evil of slavery. Many of Warren's incidental comments are incisive, the observation upon Faulkner's humor, for example: the fact that it ranges from the robust frontier sort and the Dickensian farcical to that of subdued pathos and sustained irony, and the fact that it affords only a partial perspective leading to other effects. Despite his rejection of the pragmatic rationalism of the modern temper, Warren is possibly too rationalistic in his criticism to suggest fully the Gothic aspects of Faulkner, the livid intensity of the inner conflicts in his characters, and the sheer brilliance of his imaginations. The pervasive horror and fatality in Faulkner's fiction Warren only hints at; and this is surprising in a critic who has excelled in actualizing such experience in his own creative work. This essay, all told, does demonstrate the breadth of outlook and the searching intelligence which allows Warren to pronounce authoritatively upon the whole of a writer's work. Good sense, urbanity, balance, precision of mind, a faith in the informed intelligence, a humanistic sympathy—these are the qualities which provide Warren's criticism with its strength. Warren has thus the same high respect for the supple intelligence as civilizing force and corrector of excess as had Matthew Arnold. This sort of intelligence, Warren feels, can alone elicit that total understanding of literature to which his own critical essays have so signally contributed.

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NEIL WEISS:

Swan Lake

In truth there are but atoms and the void

Just as a gull in a cage thinks, trembles
to carrion, quick-beaking eyes of the dead
and wakes to salt of deprivation, is fed—
hope is heavy on ice, a grey sky heaveless
when we with sweater and stick feel air-motes
in the mouth.

Then the dancers'
greeting. Mother, they came spinning light.
It hurt to see her dazzling crinoline, white foot
in her hand, she whirling not a sound for fright,
just gentle hissing on ice and a slight spray.
Then he, to the sky a darker figure and core
in skin-breech. I saw the slightest bulge
of mortality.

He was tender
as myth, smooth skin velour, mother, and eyes
to soft weep with. Oh, it was an all love
when, propped on my stick, I saw a third one,
wicked, finger to his lip, prance in and grin,
glide between them.

Then the lover sweated—
as he leapt, he wept, but the tears froze
him blind while the fiend crackled and kept
him curling, begging to forgive, then weaved
once and the girl slid . . . She howled . . .
Mother, forgive. It was bray of a swan,
hornweight from cave of functional flesh
that knows no speech.

And now she was a
long-necked fat-bellied thing, slapping her head
on the ice, eyes glazed, thought streaming, caught,
almost human grief and goad, staying, sliding . . .
while they rushed to each other, blending,
four legs in the air hissing—they went roaring
round, freezing to a bluebeating meteor rage,
ball of blue steaming, then silvering . . .

Mother, I stay with you.

The Circus

The bareback rider jumped
from a jogging horse
and hung by her teeth—
I slumped in my seat
and took her whirling weight.

In the cage, with gun and whip,
the liontamer gazed
at the lion through the bars
of his protecting chair
held up before his face.

When the wirewalker stepped
off, and plummeted
into the net, I saw his leg
sail over the parapet.

And a man and woman
on the trapeze, held hands,
caught and lost each other
around the knees.

The circus seemed
no special treat to me.
Take the grand finale,
a parade—

Men were dressed
in flapping scales like fish,
women looked like powdered moth,
the fat man was a tub of jelly
flowing on the bearded lady,
some clowns weeping in a dish
kept right on snapping their pants,
whips forced the elephants
to kneel, kiss, roll over—the circus
was just like any other place!

FREDERIC WILL:

Three Poems

1

Not in any known things, pond, stick, bent-hill,
Is finer subtlety than in is and was:
But in the head, in that gifted bone, still
Copulate old fibers, old cotton-laws,
Which, in a modicum of childhoods,
Sufficient moisture in the mental fields
Will exercise, inseminate, and should,
Some softest boll remembering, caress, unseal.

Head's tailor, then, would sit inside, well-warmed,
And knit and button at his tightening cloth, until,
Inconscient all the while that he'd been led
By countless cotton fingers, he would will
To be undressed again, and find, caught up in dread,
That bone and bloom alike for that lacked skill.

2

Time can well reward, it seems, the hand
And heart, paying the one in purpose, and
In sinew for its history of doubt,

The other in essential springs, which drought
And solitude had closed. Endurance moulds
The self beyond its momentary vision:
Strength is bound to circumstance, decision
To the heart's unguided flights. Man holds,
Himself, the barest power with his final
Uses, urges for his past the courage
And constructions of the present skull.
Of such weak memory is made the sage.
The moth, at twilight, capable and fair,
Recalls the impress of a womb-stitched lair.

3

Freedom turns upon a paradox:
It must be used effectively; waste,
The bent of free energy, withers the fox
Circling on the land. Libertine haste

Foils a revolution, acts with hate
To prove innate virtue, then receives
The scepter. A world retreats. Controls wait
In the bowels of states and birds. The gull weaves

Formally concentric rounds, then drops
His line straight for the sea's skin. Gulls
Live the thought of form. Yet no bird tops
The wind so strong or fair. Waste annuls

Even love. Free first-love wants its complete
Object, but exhausts its efforts soon.
Shunning the aspect, it contrives to meet
A reflect of its own delight, a moon.

As for devotion, it will live by laws.
It will define its object, fix its aim,
Then accept the blood. The blood thaws
Rigor, and the man assumes his name.

GORDON WOODWARD:

A Sound of Fury

It began the night George brought Mouse home. Until that night Nig had been in the habit of crouching in the shadows behind the big table lamp in the corner. They said that when he had first been given to them they had tried to break him of the habit; but as soon as their backs were turned he had crawled quietly back into the shadows and crouched there, sometimes sleeping and at other times gazing calmly out into the room with his pale amber eyes following every movement, although it was impossible to see him because of the bright rays from the lamp; and they said they finally stopped bothering him and let him stay there.

Then one night George brought Mouse home in a small metal cage with old newspaper wrapped around the sides; and he put the cage on the table and began gently tearing away the old column-type and shoe ads and mutilated but still-readable black headline which said, Storms Forecast, and there was Mouse huddled up in the bottom of the cage like a pink-flecked wad of soft white wool; and then some impulse which neither of them was able to explain then or later caused them to look towards the lamp in the corner.

Nig was watching them, his body still hidden in shadow and only his head thrust into the beams from the lamp so that it almost appeared to be floating, disembodied; and there was something about his eyes and the whole manner in which he held himself which contained the essence of a waiting so long sustained that it was no longer even waiting but a sort of suspension of life until some moment when there would be nothing to do but get up and stand there with an air of almost inevitable calm because that would be the moment.

They said that for several seconds neither of them moved; there was a sudden tension in the room as though the air had become charged with electricity. Mouse gave a short piping squeak of fear and George reached out instinctively and placed his arm protectively along the top of the cage; and in that same instant Nig sprang.

His aim must have been almost perfect, they said; because he landed directly on George's arm and as he did George swung his arm out quickly in a gesture caused more by surprise than anything else and he flung Nig across the room where he slammed against

the baseboard of the wall and then recovered himself and stood calmly looking at them for a moment; then he walked slowly across the room and jumped up on the table and began poking his paw between the bars in an attempt to reach Mouse who had scuttled into the little pasteboard shelter in the center of the cage; and they said that through it all they couldn't seem to do anything except stand and watch with a sort of horrified fascination.

Then George went to pick Nig up and he scratched; he tried again and Nig opened up a long gash in his finger; then he hit him. Nig reared up with his paws outstretched, the claws unsheathed like tiny glinting hooks making short rakes at the air in front of him. George put his gloves on and took a firm grip on the clawing, struggling mass of black fur and muscle and carried him across the room and Ann opened the door and George threw him outside and then stood with his back against the closed door feeling a little shaken by it all while Ann sat down in a chair by the table with her face as pale as wax; because they said they both knew then that they had had a brief glimpse of some horrible violence.

That was in early October; and the same night the first storm of the season swept down on them. By the time they went to bed the wind had mounted until it was almost a gale, driving the rain down in sudden lashing gusts as though someone were spraying the windows with a hose; the shutters strained and rattled on their catches, and the big maple tree in the back yard creaked and groaned monotonously as it swayed in the wind; and through it all they could hear the steady meowing of Nig on the back porch and they said they both began to feel sorry for him because he was out in the storm. They had brought Mouse's cage in and put it on the table beside the bed and occasionally they could hear a soft scuffing noise as he scampered around in the darkness. Then sometime in the middle of the night George half-woke from a fitful sleep to hear Nig still wailing outside and he decided he would get up in a minute and let him in; he fell asleep again.

The next morning the wind had died and there was a cold drizzle of rain falling from a lead-grey sky. They brought Mouse's cage out to the kitchen and gave him some food and then sat at the breakfast table watching him eat with his odd furtive little movements. They said he was very lively, even playful at times, and they felt relieved because they had been worried about the effect Nig's attack might have had on him. Then it occurred to them that they hadn't heard

Nig outside although he must surely have heard them moving around; and George went to the door and opened it a little at the same time blocking the opening with his legs, and he looked out and then called, NIG! Nig! Nig! And when nothing happened he came back and sat down and poured himself some more coffee. Neither needed to remind the other, they said, that it was the first time Nig had ever been away from home for more than a few hours at a time. They both watched Mouse scuttling around in his cage.

Mouse had been given to George by someone in the Pathological Division at the hospital. They said he had been so well fed and cleaned and reinforced with vitamins and hormones that he had attained a certain degree of refinement; there was something almost delicate in the way he raised himself to reach the one glistening drop of water hanging from the end of the long hollow glass tube attached to a bottle of drinking water suspended in the top of his cage. And yet it had been just that degree of refinement which had been his downfall because with it had come a certain dulling of his basic instincts and a loss of agility in his movements; and one day he had fallen clumsily from the side of his cage and broken his left hind leg which had not set properly so that he walked with a slight limp, dragging the foot a little. But they said it in no way affected his appearance: his coat had a soft lustre to it like spun glass into which his eyes had been pressed like bright tiny beads, and his long tail dragged behind him like a soft pink rubber band as he moved around the cage.

They said that as they watched him they began discussing whether or not they should keep him after what had happened. Ann said that sooner or later Nig was either going to maul Mouse or frighten him to death and so they might as well take him back or give him to some child for a pet; and George said he would be damned if he would. Then Ann said perhaps they had better get rid of Nig, then; and George said he would be damned if he would do that either. He took Mouse's cage and put it on the mantelpiece above the fireplace and then got a screwdriver and some screws and fastened the back of the cage to the wall so it couldn't be accidentally knocked to the floor. He told her before he left for the hospital that if he saw Nig around the house anywhere he would sound the horn when he got out to the car; he drove off without sounding it.

The day passed quietly. Mouse romped happily in his cage making sudden scuffing and rattling sounds of almost unbelievable loudness,

and occasionally a shrill piping squeak. Several times Ann went in to see that he was all right; and once he peered at her through the bars with his tiny forepaws bunched up beneath his quivering pink nose in such an odd way that she laughed aloud. Then about four o'clock the wind started to get up again; the sky became darker and it began to rain heavily, drumming steadily on the roof. Mouse quieted down and huddled in the center of his cage; and finally he went inside the shelter and stayed there.

Ann was becoming a little frightened because the wind was getting stronger; she kept thinking about that big swaying maple tree behind the house. She went into the living room and built a fire in the fireplace, watching it carefully until it was flaming brightly so that none of the smoke would drift up to Mouse, who still remained inside his shelter. Then she sat down in a chair with a book in her lap, although she wasn't reading it or even looking at it, but listening for the sound of George's car in the drive.

Suddenly there was a terrific clatter on the back porch and she dropped the book and sat perfectly still; then she realized it was only the wind upsetting the empty coal scuttle on the back porch, and she got up and went through the kitchen and opened the back door. Nig was standing beside the overturned scuttle; he wasn't even looking up at her but standing perfectly motionless with his eyes looking straight ahead as though he had been standing there for hours knowing that sooner or later the door would open and he would begin moving again; and he moved past her without making a sound, padding with that slow relaxed movement of bone and fibre and muscle like a soft-greased spring mechanism which might at any moment tense and detonate into a fierce-bright explosion of dismembered parts; and he walked into the living room and hesitated a moment with his eyes gazing up at the cage on the mantelpiece and then he made a long graceful leap, his glossy black coat rippling in the firelight, and he landed on the mantelpiece beside Mouse's cage, upsetting a small white figurine which fell to the stone hearth below and smashed into pieces.

Ann stepped forward impulsively and Nig opened his mouth and emitted a steady dry hissing sound, at the same time raising one paw menacingly and raking the air in front of him with sharp hooked claws; she stopped. He poked one paw between the bars and tried to reach the shelter in which Mouse was hiding, then he tried to move the cage, and finally he crouched down beside it

with only the tip of his tail flicking now and then like a raw black nerve-end and his eyes catching some reflection from the fire or the fading light outside or perhaps from some deep red-gutted fires within so that they glowed like hot amber buds. And Ann didn't do anything then except sit in a chair and watch, wondering how long the waiting would go on if no one came or the phone didn't ring; if it might not go on forever with the glow from the fire dancing in hot fluid patterns along the wall and the room growing steadily darker and Nig watching the small shelter in which Mouse was perhaps contemplating even in darkness that one slightly-twisted hind leg. Then she heard the car in the drive and moments later the sound of George's footsteps coming into the kitchen; then she shouted and he came running.

That night Ann put iodine on the fresh scratches George had received taking Nig down from the mantel and throwing him out again. Then they said they discussed the whole thing once more. Ann said the whole thing was senseless, because one of them was liable to have his eyes scratched out and they should make up their minds to getting rid of either one or the other. George wanted to know how you were supposed to get rid of a cat who had never known any other home, because you couldn't just tell him to go away the way you would a human being; and he said as far as Mouse was concerned he wouldn't get rid of him if Nig managed to pull the whole house down around them board by board, because he would be damned if he was going to have a cat dictate to him what he was or was not going to do in his own house.

He went to the basement and found some old clothesline wire and a large strong hook and an hour later he had Mouse's cage rigged up so that it was hanging a foot from the ceiling in the center of the living room, like a bird cage. Then he let Nig in and watched him as he walked slowly into the center of the room and looked up at the cage and then stood motionless for a moment as though some deep instinct warned him that even he could not leap that ten feet or more straight up in the air; then he walked over and climbed up on the back of the chesterfield and crouched there with his gaze fixed on the cage as if he expected it to plummet to the floor at any moment with a loud crash. They said that was the way things remained for months.

It was a winter of storms. They began in October and showed no sign of letting up as the months swept past and it was Christmas

and then that, too, had gone and they were well into the New Year; they said they seemed to be always going through the violent build-up of a storm or else they were caught in the cold grey ebb of one when the wind had died and the rain slanted down in cold half-sleet; and through it all Nig continued to perch on the back of the chesterfield, although they said he no longer watched the cage except when Mouse squeaked or made some unexpected sound. Every night George put Nig out while he brought Mouse's cage down and fed him and gave him fresh water and sometimes cleaned the cage out; then he would hang it up again and let Nig in who would go back to his position on the chesterfield; and they said things just went on that way.

But Nig had changed, they said. He wasn't the same cat he had been before Mouse came to the house. He had always been an affectionate cat, fond of having someone gently smoothing his glossy black coat, at which times he would lie back and contemplate the world through slitted yellow eyes with just the tip of his soft pink tongue protruding and his whole body making deep soft organ-tones of ecstasy; but when one of them stroked him then, he would merely tolerate it for a few seconds with obvious distaste and finally jump down and walk away until he knew their attention was elsewhere and then he would spring up on the chesterfield again and crouch down as he had been, almost as though he intended to sit there forever. They said he had never shown the slightest inclination to go back to his old crouching place in the shadows behind the table lamp.

Then it was mid-March and the weather became milder; and one morning they woke and pulled the drapes to find the whole countryside bathed in shimmering sunlight. They said they could have both wept for joy because it seemed to be the first break in that long depressing winter with its rain and winds; and even Mouse seemed to be cheered by the sight of the sunlight streaming in the window because he scuttled around inside his cage emitting shrill little squeaks.

Later that morning Ann was walking in the garden basking in the warmth of the sun and watching the steam rising from the moist black earth like pale wisps of smoke, and she happened to glance around and see Nig crouching calmly on the porch rail with his paws tucked under him and his eyes closed drowsily against the bright warm sun. They said that day of sunshine must have been the beginning of something; because from that day on Nig began to spend less and less time on the chesterfield and more and more time lying in the sun on the front porch, or sometimes even curled up on

the seat of the breakfast nook in the kitchen; and finally, after a few weeks, he didn't go near the chesterfield at all.

They said he was becoming more like the old Nig again; it was almost as though he had been ill or diseased or somehow bewitched and he was slowly coming back to them from somewhere. He no longer moved when they stroked him, and once or twice he even began purring with that old familiar soft-toned murmur. They often wondered if he would ever go back to his place in the shadows behind the table lamp.

Then one night George said he was going to see if Nig really had become used to Mouse, or if he was just remaining passive because he realized the futility of trying to get at him. Ann said he should leave well enough alone; but George said he wouldn't be satisfied until he knew, and besides he wanted to move Mouse's cage back to the mantelpiece because it was blocking the ceiling light where it was and throwing a big pool of shadow across one end of the chesterfield. They had just finished supper and Nig was lying in front of the fireplace with his eyes half-closed as though struggling to stay awake. George stood up on a chair and lifted the cage down and then carried it into the kitchen and put it on the table in the breakfast nook; and he kept glancing over his shoulder to see if Nig had noticed him.

Then Nig came into the room. They said they both held their breath as he walked slowly into the kitchen and hesitated a moment in the middle of the floor and then sprang up on a chair about ten feet from the table and lay down, his yellow eyes watching them and every few seconds slowly closing as if it was only by the greatest effort on his part that he could keep them open at all; then he finally closed them altogether and lay perfectly still in that state of timeless suspension and relaxation as though he had gone to sleep. Mouse scampered around in his cage, clambering awkwardly to the top of his pasteboard shelter with his tiny feet making near-inaudible sounds like the soft tapping of dried twigs.

Nig remained perfectly motionless, his eyes flicking open occasionally when Mouse made a sudden unexpected rattling sound; and once when Mouse put his front paws against the bars and peered out at him, Nig opened his eyes wide and tilted his head to one side and looked at him, exactly as he had done when he was a little kitten and someone had rolled a ball across the floor in front of him. They said they knew then that everything was going to be all right again.

The next day George put Mouse's cage back up on the mantelpiece above the fireplace, but he didn't bother fastening it because it had to be moved frequently. Nig showed only the slightest passing interest in the whole proceeding and spent the time curled up on a chair in the kitchen fast asleep.

Then three days later the weather broke again. They said it had been clear and bright when George left for the hospital that morning; and then about three o'clock Ann noticed thick heavy clouds boiling up on the horizon like banks of dark grey smoke, and the air had suddenly become very still. An hour later it had clouded over completely, blotting out the sun; it was so dark in the house that Ann had to put the lights on. Then the wind got up; she could hear the garage door slamming part-way on its chain and the shutters rattling on their catches. George phoned to say that he had just heard over the radio that they were directly in the path of a bad storm and that he was leaving immediately and would be home in about fifteen minutes; he hung up. She walked back and forth from one room to another, trying to calm herself. Nig was curled up in front of the fireplace sleeping. Now and then his ears twitched when a sudden gust of wind blew down the chimney, and once when the windows behind him rattled loudly he raised his head and looked at them a moment and then curled up again. Mouse had retreated into his shelter, not making a sound.

By the time George arrived home the wind was so strong that he had to put the whole weight of his body against the back door to close it; he said that if the wind got any stronger he would have to go out and try to nail the shutters back because the catches wouldn't stand much more. They said they were both a little worried by that time because the wind seemed to be still increasing. Ann asked George if there wasn't something he could do about the maple tree behind the house; and George said the only thing you could do with a tree like that was either cut it down or put a cable on it, and since it was too late now to do either they had better start praying it didn't fall on the house if it did come down. They said neither of them mentioned it again that evening.

Ann cooked supper although neither of them felt much like eating. They were just beginning their supper when the lights went out. George said damn; because that meant the poles were down and they would be without lights for the rest of the evening. He got up and rummaged in the cupboard for candles and brought them

back to the table and they lit several and then went on with their supper.

They said it must have been about twenty minutes later when they first noticed that the wind was dying down. One of the shutters had broken loose from its catch, swinging back against the side of the house with a sharp slamming sound, but less frequently than it had been. They looked at one another and breathed a sigh of relief because that meant that the worst of the storm was over.

Suddenly they heard a sharp splitting crack followed by a loud creaking sound, like the groaning of a thick rope hawser under increasing pressure; and they said they both sat perfectly still looking at one another over the flickering candle flames and waiting for the tree to hit. Gradually the sound rose higher in pitch; there was a confused mingling of snapping branches and ear-splitting cracks and twanging clothesline wires; and finally a solid earth-shaking whump as the tree hit the ground, shaking the whole house so violently that one of the candles toppled out of the holder and went out. For several seconds neither of them moved; then they both got up and ran outside.

They said that if it had toppled straight over from where it had snapped it would have crashed through the roof of the house and killed them both where they sat; but being a maple tree it had apparently just reached the point where it was teetering when the trunk had split lengthwise so that the heavy butt-end had slid back over the ragged end of the stump and away from the house, ploughing a deep furrow in the garden, allowing only the branches to strike the back porch and wrench one corner of the eaves trough loose so that it was left dangling. They just stood looking at it.

Then they heard the crash behind them in the house; and they both stood perfectly still. They said that was the strangest part of the whole thing; because they both knew in an instant what had happened. It was as though they had been waiting for the crash to bring everything into perspective. They went back into the house, not stopping to close the door, and picked up the candles and went into the living room; then they stopped just inside the door and stood perfectly still, completely drained of all desire to go any further.

The cage was on the floor in front of the fireplace; the top portion had broken away from the base. There were bits of Mouse's food and wisps of straw scattered around the floor; and in one corner of the carpet a small pool of water from the overturned water jar.

Nig was standing in the center of the room with the lower half of Mouse's body hanging from his mouth like a thick white beard, the long pink tail touching the floor and the tiny feet and legs stretched wide and tensed as though they were imitations made out of wire or twisted paper like the stiff pink legs on children's Easter chicks; and they said that just by looking at everything there on the floor you could imagine the whole thing from the moment the cage toppled from the mantel, or was pushed, until Mouse eventually ceased trying to move his plump little white body out of danger with the one leg dragging a little and perhaps throwing him off-balance on the thick-piled carpet, and maybe he just gave up and sat down in the middle of the floor and looked at the beauty of his soft white coat in contrast to the deep maroon carpet beneath him, waiting for the moment when Nig pounced on him.

Nig was still standing in the center of the room looking at them with his eyes catching the reflection of the candle-flames and burning like pale amber discs; and there was nothing about his way of standing there which indicated either defiance or fear, perhaps a slight disgust if anything. Then he moved slowly towards the door, his front legs moving a little awkwardly and his head held high because of Mouse's body dangling from his mouth with the long pink tail dragging. There was a sudden stillness in the room; they said it was so quiet they thought they could almost hear the sound of Nig's soft-padding feet as he moved with that slow relaxed tread across the kitchen floor and out through the open door into the night and the darkness and the storm.

DOROTHY ROBERTS:

Dazzle

Light looks from a dazzled leaf,
Stares like a small sun,
Glitters, and in the breeze
Leaps to another leaf.

Light speaks and the morning answers,
The surest answer from the tree—
Up, up, up, up and all open,
But the flight and the song breaking free
Of the branch answer, answer also,
And the brightest answer is the eye.

Light blazes from the car windshield,
Prints tendrils on the shimmering wall,
Twinkles in the flower cup. . . .
Up, up, up, up
Answer the vine and the grassblade,
The squirrel and the ball out of sight,
Answer all the shapes broken up
Into shimmer and shadow. Light

Comes to the eye from the answer,
Not direct from the fiery core—
From the kindled pebble under the sprinkler
To the glittering eye
That answers with so much seen
And the blinded "Why?"

Light plays with the chorus of the living
While the dead hurry down
Earthward to lift to the dazzle
Any answering form.

Cold

My grandparents lived to a great age in the cold—
O cruel preservative, the hard day beginning
With night and zero and the firewood
Numbing the fingers. God could have been in the flame
Responsive among the birch sticks, roaring
Up through the comforting pipes, and served all day
From the frosted woodpile, the continuing flame
As the sun almost let go of the bitter world.

But for them He stayed in the cold,
In the outer absolutes of cold among the fiery orbits,
And gave them the white breath and the blood pumping
Through hard activity stringing out the muscles
Into great age. They lived in cold
And were seasoned by it and preached it
And knew that it blazed
In the burning bush of antiquity
With starry flowers.

E. G. BURROWS:

Poem

Nor do I ask why Israel sinned
for hanging rags in a grove
and ran beside the Assyrian horse
and curried the sheep of Canaan
    for kissing a clay woman.

I have put charms against my chest,
a sack of herbs and dry words,
and burned the poisons of my birth
with a birdsfoot, bone and hair
    in an empty flowerpot,

slept with the splinter in my brain
stabbed Sisera, that trusting guest,
and shrieked upon the two-edged sword
Ehud sank in his fat foe's gut
in the lonely summerhouse.

Why should I question God with them?
We had Asshurbanipal,
Thutmose of Megiddo, and Rameses,
the kings of the shepherd Hyksos,
and the naked goddess.

Expedition

Of paradise is the King of Saxony's
bird, of paradise king
and lives in the green rain of Papua
combing incredible tresses

preening astonishing plumes
in the green rooms of rainforest,
and I have come to kill him
nor care for Saxony's king,

with poison and bird gun come
to kill the bird of bell note
in a mist and rainbow,
bird of the king's paradise,

and wrench from his head the streamers
from his wings gloss tufts
coral bronze and undersea blue
and from his throat the flute.

I must stalk him through rain and mildews
for success, a little praise.
I must not return empty-handed
nor with my hands clean.

But I am sick of the hunt.
My hair grows long in pennants
and I climb through the green leaves of Papua
to a perch among rainbows

where the bird of paradise combs
his twin incredible tresses
the King of Saxony's bird
of paradise, my king.

THOMAS B. BRUMBAUGH:

Figure Piece after Chamisso

the fresh-cheeked keeper's daughter, crowned with myrtle from her wedding, ventures into the lion's cage, and the great ecstatic creature prostrates himself before her. he looks up at the girl, comprehending her deep flood of tears, and allows himself, the faithful one, to be caressed:

"in the old far days we were so happy, like children together. you shook your flowing golden hair with kingly pride, even before you knew me, faithless, womanly and wishing i were still a child with you. but now my stranger-husband bids me follow him, never questioning, to some foreign place. yes, yes, of course, he said that i was beautiful . . . the brief engagement . . . all that is done with . . . myrtle in my hair. and you and i are forced to say goodbye in spite of grief and pain. oh, can you understand? you look so grim in spite of my new suddenly found calm, and oh you tremble terribly. now this last kiss."

her lips touch him, and all the cage is charged with noise and terror. jealously the beast stands guard at the entrance, lashing his tail, while the reluctant bride commands and threatens and then tearfully implores his mercy. the husband screams for weapons, but she ventures near the iron door and him. the angry lion seizes her slight figure, and incredibly, the dreadful spoil lies torn, distorted, and submissive on the floor. see now her master lies beside her, crushed and sorrowful, waiting for a musket ball to pierce his own dead heart.

M. M. LIBERMAN:

Fineboned Shoulder and Boyish Arm

I

When you are a young boy, it is natural, I suppose, to compare other men with your father and to like them—and him—more or less, accordingly. I do not recall that I was not fond of my father, a handsome, serious man with a mustache; but I could not get very close to him in spite of his manifest love for me. Uncle Ed, his brother, was something else, altogether. He was a thinner, younger, less stolid edition of my father. He laughed a lot and treated me as an uncle is supposed to treat a nephew when he (the uncle) has two daughters; like a son, as they say, but without the uneasiness attached to the real thing. No duty, no responsibility. Uncle Ed was concerned only with making me like him and he was not disturbed, as my father often was, if I behaved in a way to suggest that I might not grow up to be a sound man.

When I spent vacations at his home, Uncle Ed seemed bent on being free and easy. The way he couldn't be with the little daughters, that's how he was with me. He would demonstrate his new camera equipment and explain the virtues of a new pipe and, when I was a little older, he would tell me vaguely off-color jokes. He even gave me, from time to time, a half glass of beer. Aunt Dorothy seemed pleased that we enjoyed ourselves.

There were other things, too, about my uncle that made visiting him better than being home. There was the atmosphere of position, of vague affluence. I could feel it especially when I was out with him. He was a dentist in a small community. Everyone knew him. They smiled and waved and called, "Hi, there, Doc." I liked sitting next to him as we drove through town. I knew everyone seemed fond of him and I could feel the good will communicated to me. At times I felt as if I might like to open the car window and shout, "He's my uncle. He's my father's brother. He likes me a lot." Then, at dinner and later there was an absence of care in the house. There was nothing there of the trials of business life brought home and displayed for everyone to be depressed over. Unlike my father's dealings with "the public" Uncle Ed's did not sour him. Finally,

when I went to bed (much later than at home) I fell asleep almost before I could savor the warm feeling of being completely protected.

Sometimes I would get to Uncle Ed's place and find my grandparents Miller there and then I wouldn't have as much fun. First of all, I wouldn't have my uncle to myself and then Grandma and Grandpa would follow me around, directing my behavior with cross admonitions. They, too, showed much affection for me, however. But they gave me a pain.

Grandpa was, in a way, retired. He had come to this country with his father. When a boy, he took to traveling around our part of the state selling things, almost anything, house to house. Later he opened a kind of shop and got a license to dispense glasses and was a licensed optician. He was not really old, but looking back, it seems he was always tired, solemn and withdrawn. I think neither he nor my grandmother knew that there was a kind of life in which the heartaches, the wants and the worry, could, in ways, be watered down. They were always poor. Grandpa finally closed his shop once and for all, not because he could afford to but because he could ill-afford not to. For a time they lived on what the stock brought after bills and then he went peddling again, this time by bus, but as things turned out, he must have done poorly.

One year, when school had let out for the Christmas vacation, I ran all the way home to supervise the packing of my things for a week with my uncle. It was Friday and on Sunday my parents were to drive me in. When I got home I felt a strange atmosphere the moment I crashed into the house, and after I yelled for attention once and then a second time, I felt I ought to quiet down quickly for it was more than silent in the house. Yet I knew my mother was not out and I found this a little alarming.

I stood for a moment in my galoshes, dripping muddy water on the hall rug in violation of strict orders about leaving them on the porch. Moreover, in my haste, I had left the front door open. The house was uncommonly dark, I noticed, but before I could reflect further on the oddness of things, my mother came downstairs. Her face was a frightful white and her eyes had a strange filmy look. At first I was only puzzled, but when she didn't say anything about the mud or the door and just put her finger to her lips and said, "Don't wake Daddy," I started to cry. She cried too. Then as if on signal we both stopped. I looked up into her face and she told me Grandpa was dead. He had killed himself. On that cold mid-winter morning,

he had gotten off a bus and walked into a lake. He had walked until the freezing water came over his head, filling his lungs, choking the life out of his defeated body. He left a suitcase on the shore and there was a note on it. It said he didn't want to be a burden to his children. My mother sobbed as she told me this and I nearly stopped breathing to listen.

In all the unhappiness which hung in our household I forgot, momentarily, my projected visit to Uncle Ed's. But when the novelty of the death wore off, I felt disappointment.

According to custom, Grandpa Miller was to be buried the next day and I was told that while my parents went ahead to take care of Grandma, I was to stay with Mrs. Tobias. Mrs. Tobias would take me to the funeral.

A family friend of long standing, Mrs. Tobias was a fat, busy, unkempt woman, given to much talking and elaborate displaying of emotion. She had a kind of husband, a little wordless man. She took it for granted that I felt very bad about my grandfather's death. Her drab imagination would have been boggled had she known that, at most, I felt a certain mild compassion for my parents in their time of heartbreak and a great deal of annoyance at my own physical discomfort occasioned by the strangeness of the Tobias household. Moreover, I was beginning to feel that, in the way things had turned out, an injustice had been done to me, somehow. Had anyone realized that my vacation had gone out the window? Nevertheless, Mrs. Tobias persisted in looking at me pityingly and clucking and, in reference to my dead grandfather, saying again and again, "Oh, that poor man, that poor man."

That night I got to sleep with great difficulty, only to be awakened by Mrs. Tobias. She gave me a glass of warm milk, which I didn't want, and said something about catching cold. I was too tired to protest. Before I fell asleep again, I heard her talking to her husband in the next room. "Nobody took care of that old couple. I know *that,*" she was saying. *"This* one's father makes a living and *Ed* does even better. It's a shame. I heard he didn't even have an overcoat. He was wearing a thin, little topcoat. They say Ed told him he was going to buy him an overcoat, but who remembers an old father? Not Ed. A happy-go-lucky, but for his father—nothing. He thought he was a burden to his children. Imagine! God in heaven it's awful. It pays to sacrifice for children. Yesterday, it pays."

All at once and for the first time, I felt a real love for Grandpa

and felt sorry that he had died and I cried myself to sleep while Mrs. Tobias talked on.

At Grandma's house, after the funeral, Uncle Ed put his arm around me and tried to smile. "Come and visit us when you have your next vacation, keed," he said. I told him I would but when spring came, I convinced myself I had other things to do. My parents couldn't understand it. I told them that I would rather hang around with my father.

II

Now, more than anything else I wish I could talk to my father. During the long summer evenings when we sit on the porch and the warm sounds of my mother doing the kitchen chores and a cow lowing at the edge of town commingle with those of an anguished train whistle, he waits. I know he waits for me to say the words I would gladly say, more than gladly, if I knew them. Can anyone understand that it breaks my heart that I don't know what to say? The little, tentative, cautious, almost frightened exploratory thrusts; they mean he wants me to say something that means: father, I know, I understand, father, I can prove it, father, by telling you this or that much about my secret self, the self that I don't know and don't know for a certainty that I want to know; those little cautious thrusts like the embarrassed virgin touch of a boy-lover's hand, only the two middle fingers, say; they bring me more deep-bruising pain than a thousand exacerbated fists and still I cannot say the words and cannot be sure I could say them if I knew them. The pain is great enough to cause me in turn to strike back and the stupid circle of pain and remorse becomes ever wider, a forest fire of pain, guilt and remorse where here and there a grove gives on to an open road, which, when I get to it, closes in a sheet of red in my face as if out of sheer perversity.

He says: Oh stay up for a while, it's early, it's too warm to sleep.

I sit down again. I say: All right, I'll have a smoke and then I'll go to bed.

"Your car running OK isn't it?"

"Yes, it's all right."

"You get good mileage?"

"No, not very. I never did."

"I get good mileage."

"Good."

My mother says: Always drive carefully. Lots of crazy people on the road.

I'm tired. All day I've read. My eyes are like two pits of sand. New books have come from New York and last night I dreamt that I was locked in a room lined walls and ceiling with books and I was not worried about how I could get out, only about how I could read all the books, all the books in the world.

I have said to him: I read because it's important to me. I don't read because I have nothing better to do, because it's summer and I'm home. I read because it gives me more pleasure than anything in the world (not quite the truth but as much truth as there is for my father: do you understand that it grieves me that I don't know the truth for my father?).

"Your mother thinks you're bored."

"I read because I like to read."

"She thinks you should be out with young people."

"I like to read."

"She thinks you're worried about something."

"Oh for God's sake."

"She thinks something's bothering you you're not telling us."

"For God's sake nothing's bothering me and if there were would you expect a man my age to tell you about it?"

"It's your mother. You know I don't interfere in your affairs. I don't worry."

"I like to read."

"I understand. It's your mother."

"Ah, you're as bad as she is. Jesus Christ I'm going to bed."

She says: Gordon.

He says: OK, OK, I'll sit here alone.

I say: Mother's here.

He says, "She's tired. She'll be going to bed in a few minutes too, but g'wan, I don't care."

"You're always doing that."

"What?"

"Making me feel as if I'm deserting you. Making me feel ashamed. Here I want to go to bed and you won't let me go without making sure I feel rotten about leaving you alone."

Mother says, "Gordon, you talk like a ten-year-old. He doesn't care if you go to bed. G'wan if you want to go to bed. Nobody's stopping you. We'll all go soon."

"I've been trying to go to bed for the last half hour. Every time I get up he says what's your hurry, it's hot, it's early and he looks at me as if I were deserting him, abandoning him. He gives me that hurt look."

"Ah, what in hell are you talking about?" he says. "For God's sake go to bed. What do you want from me anyway?"

To her: "Ever hear such a thing? Just wanted to talk to him a little bit. What did I do?"

In bed I turn and fret until I see a stairway going up, up and then down into my sleep where the steps are impossibly wide and soiled and are at crazy angles to the damp, cracked walls of an old movie-house. Here my father is young and peacefully, plainly happy and handsome, the small handsome man of my earliest recollections in which he is carrying a bag of pop-corn as we go into the enormous side-street door, past gorgeously colored posters of a man in green, carrying a sword and leaping over a wall to a girl standing demurely in the middle distance. At the foot of the stairs, my father, a very young man with a black mustache, tells me we want pop-corn, don't we, and he gives the man behind the little black case something and laughs and hands me an oily paper bag and smiles, he is so happy to be with me, more loving than when he comes home at night and frowns and complains that it is impossible to make a decent living. I look at Doug Fairbanks look at the girl on the wall and push my hand into the oily bag and my father nibbles from the top of his, all the while looking at his son, not the stairs, and he stumbles and falls flat and hard on his stomach while his hands and feet are out in all directions like a crab and the pop-corn bounces like a battalion of bugs and the ticket taker at the top of the stairs and his companion laugh so hard they are nearly in tears and I hate them so fiercely I nearly cry too and inside I soon tire of Robin Hood. The evening is ruined for me in the pop-corn and sweat stink of the Happy Hour. I try to lift my head off my chest to look at Doug in the funny tight suit and then at the man next to me, my father, who is watching the screen as if he has forgotten me and I do my best to stay awake and then suddenly I am bolt upright having heard the outraged scream in the next room and my mother's voice saying you had a nightmare, Ben, and my father saying I saw my father in the water.

WILLIAM BYSSHE STEIN:

The Moral Axis of "Benito Cereno"

For over twenty-five years the secret to the meaning of "Benito Cereno" has lain buried in a familiar academic grave—a study of the source of the story.[1] To be sure, all Melville scholars know of its existence, and perhaps each, at one time or another, has consulted the article in some vague turn of curiosity. But no one has, to my knowledge, attempted to collate the historical parallel with the story proper —that is, in a meaningful act of criticism. In the execution of this purpose one would seek to explain the rationale of Melville's changes of and additions to the original account of the phase of the voyage given fictional treatment. Such an endeavor would center on the concrete materials with which his creative imagination worked. This effort would, in effect, provide an insight into his narrative purpose. This essay proposes to define this one perspective of the story.

I

Melville's selection of the particular sequence of scenes from the historical source first requires scrutiny. Here the moral incipience of the dramatic situation apparently attracted him. If he had been interested primarily in the sensational aspects of the experience, he naturally would have picked the exciting episode of the mutiny. Instead he preferred to focus on the spiritual and physical dilemma of the Spanish captain, as actualized in the satanic deception of the Negroes after Amasa Delano had boarded the floundering ship. Several factual details in the historical account—data which had an irresistible appeal for Melville's imagination—also integrated with this narrative purpose, especially the symbolic adumbrations of the names Amasa and Benito. His familiarity with the Old Testament enabled him to see the astonishing parallel between Delano's danger on the *San Dominick* and Amasa's treacherous murder by Joab.[2] Benito, in its easily demonstrable

[1] Harold H. Scudder, "Melville's *Benito Cereno* and Captain Delano's *Voyages*," *PMLA*, XLIII, (June, 1928), 502-532.

[2] See II Samuel 20:9-10.

connection with "blessed," permitted him to anchor the action in a biting irony of tone.

Melville's further alterations of the historical account extend this statement. To strengthen the contrapuntal relations of these personal names to the basic religious orientation of the action, Melville deliberately changed the names of the ships found in his source. The subtle change of the Spanish ship from *Tryal* to *San Dominick* speaks for itself. Etymologically, Dominick means "belonging to the Lord." Thus the ship is symbolically transformed into the dominical vessel of Christ with Benito as its commander. With the ship's name Melville quietly advises the reader to anticipate a thematic development centering on the idea of Christian salvation. The substitution of *Bachelor's Delight* for the American ship's name of *Perseverance* is part of the same design. The mutation reflects the unrelatedness and irresponsibility of Delano's moral command, symbolically an authority without vital ethical sanction. This interpretation evolves logically from Melville's cutting disparagement of the bachelor in "The Paradise of Bachelors," with all its implications of vicarious eroticism: the bachelors who go "two by two and arm-in-arm . . . to their neighboring chambers to turn over the *Decameron* ere retiring for the night."[8] This view of Delano is consistent with the atmosphere of irony which envelops the story, for at every turn Melville is disposed to mock his spiritual awareness so as to control the sympathies of the reader. This is evident in the first comment on Delano's character:

> Captain Delano's surprise might have deepened into some uneasiness had he not been a person of a singularly undistrustful good-nature, not liable, except on extraordinary and repeated incentives, and hardly then, to indulge in personal alarms, any way involving the imputation of malign evil in man. Whether, in view of what humanity is capable, such a trait implies, along with a benevolent heart, more than ordinary quickness and accuracy of intellectual perception, may be left to the wise to determine.

Thus Melville invites the reader to share his amusement, at the same time calling attention to the name symbolism. Nor is this the last phase of it, for in the course of the story he ingeniously manipulates an increasing number of appellative details.

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[8] *Selected Tales and Poems*, ed. Richard Chase (New York, 1950), p. 214.

His additions to the historical materials also betray a desire to color the moral situation with a deeper religious tint. He accomplishes this by skillful insertions of sacred imagery. As the *San Dominick* looms through the morning mist, an unequivocal "matin light" bathes the cabin of the ship, and its superstructure is "wimpled by . . . low, creeping clouds, not unlike a Lima intriguante's one sinister eye . . ." In the juxtaposition of the matin light and the metaphor of the wimpled conspirer, the subversion of the holy is figuratively broached. On the literal level of the plot it anticipates the assault of Babo's malevolence on Benito's faith in the power of Christian redemption. Symbolically the divine is depicted under the incubus of evil, for, in another sacred perspective, this is the time of the day which inaugurates the first of the canonical hours of the Divine Office—the daily services and prayers offered by the church in praise of the redeemer. From another direction Melville encourages the belief that the dominical vessel of Christ is in danger.

Delano's first impression of the *San Dominick* extends this idea. He envisages it in an image of "slovenly neglect":

> . . . a white-washed monastery after a thunderstorm, seen perched upon some dun cliff among the Pyrenees. But it was no purely fanciful resemblance which now, for a moment, almost led Captain Delano to think that nothing less than a ship-load of monks was before him. Peering over the bulwarks were what really seemed, in the hazy distance, throngs of dark cowls; while, fitfully revealed through the open port-holes, other dark moving figures were dimly descried, as of Black Friars pacing the cloisters.

Another dimension of the dominical symbol is also obvious in this passage. The Black Friars are Dominican brothers, and Delano's ironical hallucination, his vision of the Negroes as Black Friars, is, in context, a blasphemous pun suggesting that the dominical ship of Christ is manned by impostors.

This association is legitimate in view of Melville's preoccupation with the Manichaean heresy, and it is inevitable when analyzed in connection with St. Dominic. The latter, historically, implemented the holy war which led to the extermination of the extreme Manichaean sect, the Albigenses. His role in the fanatical crusade—at least in the stress that would appeal to Melville—was in the office of Inquisitor. Apocryphally, he ruthlessly and inhumanly sentenced thousands to death. Though they believed in a radical dualism in which God

and Satan shared equal power in the universe, they aroused the wrath of church authorities more because they denied the necessity of an organized ecclesiastical empire. A rigid Christocentrism characterized their beliefs. One could achieve salvation without the intercession of the church if he became ascetically perfect. Then he needed only to take up his cross and follow Christ. This tenet, of course, correlates with the motto on the bow of the *San Dominick: "Sequid vuestro jefe"* (Follow your leader), a crucial addition to the historical text. Thus the collective associations hint of a conspiracy against the dominical ship of Christ, not however without a note of frosty irony, the imputation that the church discourages a complete faith in the Saviour.

Authority for this interpretation is provided in the allusion to the construction of the *San Dominick,* whose "keel seemed laid, her ribs put together, and she launched, from Ezekiel's Valley of Dry Bones." The context of this image in the Bible generates still another reverberation of Christ, further evidence of Melville's Christocentric emphasis. This chapter in Ezekiel contains one of the most famous of the Messianic prophecies which begins with a condemnation of the spiritual reality of the Israelites: "Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost: we are cut off for our parts." A resurrection for the dry bones is prophesied, however, with the coming of the Saviour and devotion to his ideals: "And David my servant *shall be* king over them . . .; they shall also walk in my judgments, and observe my statutes, and do them."[4] So too, Melville later points out, may Benito experience a rebirth; he needs only to follow the leader of the dominical vessel.

Melville invokes two other images in his description of the *San Dominick,* both of which tie up with the Biblical quotations. On the stern, the medallioned shield of Castile and Leon adjoins a mythological device of a satyr subduing another writhing masked figure. Here Melville refers to Ferdinand I of Spain. The latter united the two warring provinces of Castile and Leon under the rule of Christendom during the Middle Ages. This same emperor was also known as *El Magno,* "the King of Kings," whose rout of the Saracens, and whose profound piety magnified him into a legendary soldier of Christ. In contrast with this patent allusion to the Saviour, the figure of the satyr, an antichrist, inverts the meaning of the Spanish coat-of-arms: the power of Christ is in descendance. The dramatic struggle with evil, in accordance with the vision of Ezekiel, can only be resolved

[4] Ezekiel 37:11, 28.

through fidelity to the redeemer. In effect, Melville asserts that only the deep and dynamic faith of a Ferdinand I can master the forces of Satan which have always challenged the world of Christendom.

The key to this mystery of faith is ironically pictured in the scrawled letters beneath the canvas covering the figure-head of the ship: *"Sequid vuestro jefe."* On the literal level of the plot this is Babo's way of intimidating the Spaniards on the ship, for underneath the canvas lie the bones of Alexander Aranda, riveted to the bow. Melville later clarifies the significance of this mock crucifixion in the documentary epilogue to the story, a revised portion of the historical text. He indicates that the ship's proper figurehead is "the image of Christopher Colon, the discoverer of the New World." The insertion of this phrase is an unquestionable rubric—a warning to the reader that he must interpret it in the context of the symbolic crucifixion. If one is to follow the leader, he will follow Christopher, etymologically "the Christ-bearer." Thus to discover "the New World" will be to discover the new Jerusalem—the new world of the spirit. And with this image Melville tightens the design of his name symbolism, giving it a climactic orientation. Along with the previous alterations and additions of religious and historical imagery, he urges an interpretation of "Benito Cereno" in the framework of the traditional redeemer myth of Christianity.

II

With all the *conscious* effort reflected in the integration of the diverse image correlatives, it seems logical to assume that Melville intends the redeemer myth to determine the symbolic roles of his main characters. The myth does precisely this, and its medium is verbal and situational ambiguity. Delano's thoughts, for example, invariably cast doubt on the reality of things seen. He is prone to reiterate that what he observes appears to be an enactment of a mysterious drama: ". . . possibly master and man, for some unknown purpose, were acting out, both in word and deed, nay, to the very tremor of Don Benito's limbs, some juggling play before him . . ." He attributes to the latter that "strange ceremoniousness . . . not uncharacteristic of one playing a part above his real level." Literally this is true. Benito plays the part of the *mock host.* And the last word is repeated again and again, as if Melville were importuning the reader to take cognizance of its strange context. Its usage is inconsistent with nautical language; instead its overtones are jarringly

ironical. *Host,* then, becomes a rigid reading direction on the symbolic level of the story.

Against the background of the redeemer myth, the part Benito plays is the role of the mock Christian host. A false Christ, he is unable to cope with the physical suffering, the spiritual anguish, and the bitter ignominy of circumstance in which he is called upon "to follow [*his*] leader." His soul is not enlightened spiritually by unbearable suffering. He forgets the injunction of the Saviour, the Man of Sorrows in the Gospels, whose earthly life culminated in an agonizing death: "If any man will *come after Me,* let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and *follow Me.* For whosoever wishes to save his life shall destroy it."[5] The records of the New Testament testify to a prevailing sense of human misery akin to Benito's, but they do not sanction a cowardly retreat into the inertia of fear. The Spanish captain ignores the stringent caveat of faith in Christ: "if the world hate you, ye know it hated me."[6] Delano, whose symbolic role is that of an initiant in the ritual presentation of the host, similarly exhibits physical and moral cowardice. He is never able to transcend thoughts of his own safety and death. He too is oblivious to the message of the cross that a God of mercies comforts the individual in every situation so that he may be enabled to comfort others in need of succor. But this conviction of Christian faith is beyond the reach of Delano.

Melville's manipulation of the symbolic roles of Benito and the American points logically to Alexander Aranda's part in the drama. As owner of the dominical vessel, he is the true Christ. Since his "dry bones" are nailed above the motto, he must be associated with the redeemer image. Significantly, it is Alexander Aranda who, in the words of the mock host, permits the slaves, the tools of pain and sorrow aboard the Lord's vessel, "to range within given bounds at their pleasure." Thus evil, as an active force in human life, reigns at the pleasure of the Saviour in order to test the moral and spiritual integrity of anyone who professes to follow His teachings.

Out of this grant of freedom grows the next development of the redeemer myth. In the Passion enacted before Delano's eyes, Melville stages a mock presentation of the host, a parody on the sacrament of the Eucharist. He supports it by interpolative imagery: "things exhib-

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[5] Matthew 16:24-25. Italics are mine. They indicate Melville's probable reason for choosing the motto of "follow your leader."

[6] John 15:18.

ited," "acts done," and "things said." In other words, the traditional *symbola* of the Christian rite of Communion, hideously inverted, are held up to view. Delano's spiritual response to this ceremonial performance is a travesty of faith. By fits and starts of bland credence in a divine providence he contemplates the inconsistent hospitality of the host; and, when moved to doubt about his own security, he perfunctorily addresses himself to the heavens: "Too nonsensical to think of! Who would murder Amasa Delano? His conscience is clean. There is one above." On other occasions Melville, to sharpen the profile of the captain's moral hypocrisy, exposes him in another angle of light: "it was with captains as with gods; reserve, under all events, must still be their cue." It is not for Delano to read the prophecy of the Saviour which, symbolically, an old Spanish sailor offers him in a knotted Gordian rope. This is the knot which Alexander the Great severed at the temple of Ammon where he was proclaimed a saviour by the priests of the sun. No, in this instance the knot is undone by a Negro; the secret of the redeemer is for him a Christian mystery in the literal sense. This symbolic ambiguity of deity is depicted in even more ironical terms. Viewing Benito's lack of control over the Black Friars, the American can think of "no sadder plight than a commander who has little of command but the name." And, of course, this remark simply reflects Delano's appalling spiritual stagnation—the vague image of Christ that he carries in his soul.

In a dramatic tableau Melville accentuates still further the latter's insensitivity to intimations of Christianity. Catching a glimpse of Benito in the iconographic position of Christ in a sacred stereotype, he is inexplicably moved to silent reverence, for looking

> over once more towards his host—whose side-face, revealed above the skylight, was now turned towards him—he was struck by the profile, whose clearness of cut was refined by the thinness incident to ill health, as well as ennobled by the beard. Away with suspicion. He was *a true off-shoot of a true hidalgo Cereno.*

Again Melville plays with the disturbing implications of a name; Cereno, in the context of the last sentence in the passage, refers to serenity or peace; and the entire metaphor seems to be a paraphrase of the gospel verse: "I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman."[7] In addition, the dramatic situation which it encompasses

[7] John 15:1.

parallels the scene of pain and anguish which Delano observes. But for Delano there is no spiritual insight. As the Biblical analogue suggests, there is only barrenness and sterility where the branch is cut from the vine; the true vine is only a shadowy memory in Delano's soul.

The religious charade that Melville enacts before Delano is, in its inception, perhaps based on a historical coincidence in the source—a detail which knitted unobtrusively into the design of the adaptation. The *San Dominick* is headed for the island of Santa Maria at the time she is boarded by the American. Here, literally, "they might water easily," but in the symbolic sense Melville apparently sees in this part of the voyage a quest for rejuvenation—in terms of the narrative Delano's opportunity to achieve spiritual enlightenment, as the Virgin Mary's Son offered grace to His followers.

The profane burlesque of the Eucharist which now ensues is disguised in the most innocent of intercalations to the original manuscript—the barbering episode and the meal thereafter. In setting the scene for these incidents, Melville slyly stresses their ritualistic practice, emphasizing another recurrent epithet in the story, one likewise associated with Christ—namely *master:* "Master told me never mind where he was, or how engaged, always to remind him, to a minute, when shaving time comes." Not content with this explicit rubric, Melville proceeds to sketch in a sacred background for the rite, albeit shoddy and disreputable as befits his purpose. On one side of the cuddy into which Babo forces the mock host, in contiguity with cutlasses, harpoons, and tattered rigging, "like a heap of *poor friars' girdles,*" is a devil-marked "claw-footed old table lashed to the deck; a *thumbed missal* on it, and over it *a small, meagre crucifix* . . . ." What uglier image of the depravity of the holy can be painted? None, perhaps, unless, like Melville, one adds the final crushing detail: "Opposite was a cumbrous washstand, of black mahogany, all of one block, with a pedestal, like *a font.*" Delano is not unimpressed with what is exhibited; in the strange there is something familiar. "Looking around," he observes, " 'this seems a sort of dormitory, sitting room, sail-loft, [*and*] chapel.' " And a Christian house of worship it is, with the emblem of the Trinity: "The further extremity of the cuddy . . . was pierced with *three openings.*"

Next Melville describes the consecration of the putative host. Benito is swathed in a king's banner. This preliminary rite of investiture bristles with trenchant irony, and at the same time lends unequivocal

proof to the tight axial structure of the imagery which supports the weight of the literal narrative. The devices of this bunting, "the castle and the lion," constitute another allusion to Ferdinand I, who established the reign of Christianity in Spain. The nature of this sacrilege is thus twofold, a desecration of both the temporal and eternal symbol of Christ over the forces of evil. Captain Delano's reaction to this apostasy displays the brilliant subtlety of Melville's verbal ambivalence: " 'Why, Don Benito, this is the flag of Spain you use here. It's well it's only I, and not the King, that sees this, but *it's all one, I suppose . . . .*' "

The *symbola* of "acts done" now takes the form of a rite of castration. Babo rests Benito's chin in the "font," and the trimming of the beard and chin begins. Though at first glance innocuous, this act is another detail pregnant with ceremonial meaning. Melville certainly could not forget the equivalent incident in the story of Samson. In this scene Benito is deprived of his strength to contest evil, and the covenant of surrender is sealed with blood vindictively drawn from his chin. This blood sacrifice, a parody on the voluntary offering of the host, also provides Melville with the chance to further delineate Delano's myopic perspective on the life of the spirit and Benito's inability to remember the redemption promised in the blood of Christ. The latter recoils from Babo's razor in terror while Delano, despite the obvious anguish of the host, mutters callously about his inability to " 'endure the sight of one little drop of his own.' " Such were the derisive remarks that Christ heard on the cross, likewise the product of a spiritual obtuseness similar to Delano's. But Babo's comment on the affair cogently summarizes Melville's attitude towards both men: " 'But answer . . . please, master, while I wipe the ugly stuff off the razor.' "

So studied and precise is Melville's description of each step of the ceremonial barbering that, even in a hasty reading, one is compelled to pause and wonder. The gestures of Babo, in particular, betray a priestly formality, contrasting vividly with the prosaic actuality of the service being performed. Delano's uneasiness is therefore aggravated; he is baffled by the mysterious proceedings: "What could be the object of enacting this play of the barber before him? At last, regarding the notion as a whimsy, insensibly suggested, perhaps, by the theatrical aspect of Don Benito in his harlequin ensign, Captain Delano speedily banished it." The unusual ritual culminates when Babo "bestir[s] himself with a small bottle of scented waters, pouring

a few drops on the head." This act of sanctification, symbolic of the incensing which precedes the elevation of the host, prepares for Melville's Eucharistic meal.

Melville asks the reader to witness a shocking inversion of the communion meal in which the relative positions of the protagonist and the antagonist at the betrayal supper are transposed. Babo deploys the host into place, and the mock ceremony commences. One can judge Melville's intention here only by reference to his other versions of the *agape* in "The Two Temples" and "Poor Man's Pudding and Rich Man's Crumbs," four mutually related stories which, in a devolving series, trace the degradation of the Communion Sacrament into a bestial charity meal for the starving poor. In all the stories, just as in the one under discussion, he takes note of the fact that the external act of eating the common meal, as practiced in primitive Christianity, symbolized the mystic infusion of the spirit of Christ into the participants. In essence, the Last Supper gave Christ the opportunity to announce His forthcoming death and His willingness to sacrifice Himself. The sacrifice itself was the basis of the new covenant and Christ in this manner requested similar service from His followers if His mission on earth was to be realized. Contrasting the assumptions of Christ with the behavior of Benito in an identical situation, one perceives in the latter's reenactment of the passion aboard the dominical vessel the grotesque disintegration of the spiritual legacy of the Saviour: "the host sat silent and motionless," paralyzed by a vicarious reminiscence of the physical and spiritual tribulations of the passage on the *San Dominick*. Literally and symbolically, he betrays his religious heritage—his role as host. Melville, in this portion of the narrative, invokes the word persistently, drumming an awareness into the eyes and ears of the reader that is beyond the requirements of mere rhetoric. It is not to be expected that Melville would utilize every movement of the eucharistic rite. As his additions to the historical manuscript demonstrate, he merely intends to create a pattern of ceremonial practice, the main features of which ought to be familiar to anyone who professes even the slightest knowledge of Christianity and its history. The dominical vessel and the host more than accommodate even the most dismal ignorance.

Ultimately, the black priest who supervises the entire rite crowns the stinging mockery of Melville's religious charade. Babo, dissimulator extraordinary and devil nonpareil, usurps the position of Christ. Beyond the effect of his malevolent influence on Benito, his gulling

of Delano is also of extreme importance. Melville is able to reveal the latter's spiritual insensitivity—his lack of soul culture. Despite his vague intuitions into the ritual mask, he inevitably lapses into complacency. Even when instinct warns him, he is quick to rationalize his fears. Startled by the ringing of "the flawed bell" of the dominical vessel, he recoils in horror: "In images far swifter than . . . sentences, the minutest details of all his former distrusts swept through him." Like Bannadonna in *The Bell-Tower* he is deaf to the call of Christ which the bell symbolizes.

Melville, a moment later, in a direct allusion to the Last Supper, offers sanction for the ritual interpretation of the previous action. Delano, again aroused to suspicion, imagines himself the victim of a sinister plot in which he parallels the Spaniard with the "Jew, who refrained not from supping at the board of him whom the same night he meant to betray." In the midst of succumbing to this dark distrust of the host, he chides himself for having "betrayed an almost atheist doubt of the ever-watchful Providence above." Yet on the heels of this thought he forgets Christ once more; the outer act, not inward purity of impulse, determines his moral values: "Ah, thought he, after good actions one's conscience is never ungrateful, however much so the benefited party be."

Symbolically, his darkness of the soul is equated with the disappearance of the sun into the deceptively "innocent repose" of the evening. The darkening of the physical world enables Melville to achieve a subtle structural balance. For, as indicated earlier, Delano first observes the *San Dominick* bathed in "matin light," an ingenious emblematic insertion designed to arouse man to the worship of Christ. It deepens the irony of the concluding image of "the flawed bell," the call to vesper devotions. The dominical ship is indeed in danger. In a symbolic movement from light to darkness the sway of evil is announced. Melville stresses this aspect of the moral drama in the farewell between the two captains: "Don Benito would not let go the hand of Delano, but retained it in his, *across the black's body.*" In this cross which the clasped hands make with Babo's body, an inversion of the crucifixion is symbolized since Benito permits Delano to depart without warning him of the danger which impends. Selfishness is substituted for selflessness.

In this climax of denial Christian faith and hope are renounced. Benito fails to follow the leader. His pitiable moral decadence is symbolized in an external image of fear—the human skeleton of death

on the bow which Babo unveils in another of Melville's gestures of mockery. This crucified body affirms his allegiance to the temporality of life and the dominance of evil. The myth of the redeemer is thus reduced to a plan of salvation without meaning to man. The rescue of Benito proves this point. It is a dramatic device utilized by Melville to enhance man's obsession with the safety and security of his physical body. The fate of the soul is lost sight of in man's subjective imprisonment in phenomenal existence: physical suffering triumphs over spiritual fortitude. The Christian Saviour in "Benito Cereno" is relegated to the limbo of all the pagan redeemers who preceded him. His redeeming power is dead *in man.*

The triumph of physical evil over the eternal values of the spirit is repeated in Babo's symbolic exaltation in the square of Lima—Melville's heretical elevation of the host of the devil: "the head, that hive of subtlety, fixed on a pole in the Plaza, met, unabashed, the gaze of the whites; and across the Plaza looked towards St. Bartholomew's church, in whose vaults slept then, as now, the recovered bones of Aranda." Melville's final stroke of irony asserts the death of the true Christ. In locating the church atop Mount Agonia his focus on the redeemer myth is reaffirmed. The name of this fictitious peak is a Greek epithet meaning "a struggle for victory," and it symbolizes the patron saint of the church who was crucified for stubbornly clinging to his faith in Christ. Conversely, Benito dies a prey to evil, and is buried in the memorial church whose faith he disclaims. Babo's victory over the "blessed" captain is resoundingly proclaimed. The image of the redeemer is dead in the mock host's soul. He has failed to follow his leader.

III

Blasphemy or satire—either or both—the moral resolution of the story clearly establishes Melville's vision of the contemporary soul: its hollowness, its despair. In Benito and Delano the two streams of religious culture in Western civilization pour into the insatiable wasteland of the spirit. Dying more a spiritual than a physical death, the Spaniard through his fate impugns the vital function of the Catholic Church in human affairs. Dissipated are its powers to direct the moral resources of its followers into selfless, creative endeavors. The martyrdom and the self-sacrifice on which the foundations of the mother church were laid are only whispers of faith and rumors of

dogma. In the decay of its central symbolic rite—the Eucharist—Melville enunciates its failure. Similarly, in Delano's belief that " 'the past is passed; why moralize upon it? Forget it,' " the rootlessness of Protestant iconoclasm is directly indicted. Out of touch, ritualistically, with the sources of early Christian faith, the dissenting body of Christians is now in search of a soul. The Emersons of the author's day dramatically affirm this quest. Losing the vision of Christ within, they project it without, externalizing it in nature and the frozen creeds of philosophic verbalism. This tendency to project the ideal outward, in Melville's mind, robs the Christ image of its mysterious relation to inner man. Delano is a typical product of this faith—a posturing, religious automaton without the semblance of spiritual culture. His soul is out of key with his external beliefs. It is constantly denied in thought and act by its possessor. Thus its fate, if less painful than that of Benito's, will be the same. However, in the awareness of inadequacy there is scope for a despair of tragic dimensions; in the veneer of external piety there is scope only for comic hollowness. So Melville damns his civilization—and perhaps himself.

ELI SIEGEL:

Also

Sometime, you know, a novel will come
From a wooded land, possessing the biting word,
The lulling clause; in it lines will be
That will cause ringing in the body,
Swayings in the eye. It will be a novel which
French will have, and French-Asian, Asian-Hani,
Asian-Trom. Twigs will be in it for wringing action,
Twisting motion. It will be a novel having
The graceful, light, much-moving cannon, and, see, too,
The delicate, definite, black battery, the dark, all-knowing regiment.
This novel will be called The Colonel's Daughter,
Or, Rivers Forded Effectively. Glamor, words, branches,
Also, this novel has.

HAZARD ADAMS:
Yeats the Stylist and Yeats the Irishman

RICHARD ELLMANN: *The Identity of Yeats.* Oxford.
The Letters of W. B. Yeats (Allan Wade, editor). Macmillan.

Books on Yeats, and there are a good many of them, have been for the most part biographies or biographical approaches to the poetry. One of the three important biographies is Richard Ellmann's *Yeats, the Man and the Masks,* and now Mr. Ellmann provides what has been for the most part lacking, a general book emphasizing style and symbolism. Even in those books clearly on Yeats's poetry the biography figures in odd ways. In Vivienne Koch's *W. B. Yeats, the Tragic Phase,* for example, Yeats's Steinach operation is emphasized, and in T. R. Henn's *The Lonely Tower* there is considerable recourse to Yeats's life and "philosophy." There is a reason for this preoccupation with Yeats's life, and Mr. Ellmann, in explaining what Yeats's conception of style is, gives it. Yeats conceived of style as "that element in literature which corresponds to the moral element in life. . . . Style was a question of the vigour with which positions were taken and of the honesty with which qualifications were made." We can easily see then why a book which sets out to deal primarily with Yeats's style appears to deal in peripheral matters. When a writer begins to write about Yeats's poetry, he finds himself writing about Yeats. Yeats's own style and his conception of it drive him to do so. Nevertheless, Mr. Ellmann keeps a steady course and does not get lost either in the thicket of Irish politics or the slough of Rosicrucianism. He valiantly battles the Charybdis of gyres and cones and he hacks away at the Scylla which is Yeats's symbolical structure. At times he barely escapes, but if we disagree with what he says we are usually disagreeing with the emphasis he puts on certain points. Mr. Ellmann argues that "Yeats's themes and symbols are fixed in youth, and then renewed with increasing vigour and directness to the end of his life," and he adds that "changes in diction are largely to blind us to the constancy of themes." His view is that Yeats's stylistic changes (syntax and diction) as he substitutes one symbol for another are likely to "conceal their equivalence." For example, he writes, "The sphere is the mature equivalent of the rose. It differs from the rose [Yeats's early symbol] in that Yeats only occasionally mentions it in his verse; that is because it had come to seem a remoter ideal."

One wishes the emphasis were different here. The truth, of course, is that the sphere *is* different from the rose or Yeats would not have made what Mr. Ellmann calls a "substitution"; but even more important, Mr. Ellmann seems momentarily to be abstracting the symbols from the stylistic context in which they appear. The word "mature" may be calculated to get Mr. Ellmann out of this, but I doubt that it is successful. The rose image in Yeats must be taken as part of a somewhat mawkish and plangent poetic projection. In this sense—remoteness from life—the rose is really more remote than the sphere, which is a harder, colder object in what Yeats himself described as a harder, colder

context. Symbols make and are made by their contexts; allegories are imposed upon poems. It is true that in *A Vision* Yeats tells us that "only one symbol" exists; others are merely apparent reflections of the single symbol. But Yeats is a poet of apparent things, and thus the differences between symbols are more important than the similarities. Mr. Ellmann himself tells us that some of the familiar symbols of Yeats's early poetry gradually take on a different aspect in the later poems. Even the early elemental imagery of air, earth, fire, and water seems changed drastically by the later contexts.

To read through Yeats's poems and to observe the symbolism carefully is to remember the unity of Yeats's vision from beginning to end, but also (and this, it seems to me, Mr. Ellmann does not emphasize as much as he might) to become aware of the great variety and uniqueness which his different styles compelled his symbols to enforce. Mr. Ellmann's own observation that Yeats could make Greek mythology—thought by many impossible to use any longer—come alive and work for him really enforces this view of style and symbolism as parts of an infrangible unity. This is a most important observation; and the phenomenon of Yeats's success with Greek myth is made much more meaningful in the light of Mr. Ellmann's discussion of Yeats's style and rhetoric. With many excellent examples, Mr. Ellmann organizes and presents what are obviously the elements of diction and syntax which gave Yeats his particular later voice. He shows that Yeats, though he eschewed the archaic, was really making a new selection of language. Yeats's language is highly formal to the end and sometimes apparently still archaic. Subjunctives are used by beggars, certain kinds of inversions still appear, but the adjective following the noun is gone.

Actually, Yeats achieved greatness of style when he was able to restore the rhetorical and oratorical to poetry without falling into the syntactical and dictional clichés of politicians and certain earlier poets. Some of the "unnaturalness" of Yeats's style comes from his tendency towards compression, the closing of things into a very tight, highly formal language, the act of which tends to remove his poetry from what he would have called—in his own vocabulary—"politics." Mr. Ellmann does not actually make this point about Yeats's compression, though he does argue that immediacy and suddenness are often a result of Yeats's unconventional grammar, but his discussion leads us inevitably to it. He vigorously defends Yeats's stylistic devices by describing their effects. One suspects he oversteps occasionally here. The last line of "'To a Poet Who Would Have Me Praise Certain Bad Poets . . .' has always seemed to me an instance of compression gone wrong: "But was there ever dog that praised his fleas?" Nevertheless, Mr. Ellmann's discussion of style manages to say much of importance in a succinct and convincing fashion.

With the qualification already made about separating the consideration of the symbolism from that of the style (leading to an overemphasis upon similarities), I believe that Mr. Ellmann's first chapter is as effective a general introduction to Yeats's art as I have read. He is to be praised also because he has expended only eleven pages in achieving his end. Of course, any such introduction raises all sorts of theoretical problems, which the critic in this day feels he must discuss. In Chapter III, therefore, Mr. Ellmann goes about arguing

that the center of a Yeats poem is not its ideological content. Though such an argument seems almost a cliché of modern criticism, it is more preached than practiced. The value of Mr. Ellmann's discussion in "Assertion Without Doctrine" is the very concise and persuasive manner of his explanation of Yeats's attitude toward the problem of ideology.

Thus far my objections to Mr. Ellmann's book have been against what I conceive to be failure of emphasis. There are one or two more of these, minute as they may seem. Tilting with *A Vision,* as all Yeats commentators must, Mr. Ellmann sometimes takes it as a product of high seriousness, which it is not. *A Vision* has many appearances, running from hoax all the way to philosophy. Before Yeats finishes the book he has apologized for its being each one of these things. Perhaps what we need is a book called *Irish Yeats.*

Mr. Ellmann tells us blithely that Yeats's vortex image has nothing to do with Blake's. This is false. Blake was observing the vortex from a different point of view. He also argues that Yeats's theory of the mask comes from Nietzsche rather than Blake. Though Blake does not use the term "mask," much of Yeats's conception of the mask image clearly comes from Blake's treatment of spectre and emanation, whose conflict is similar to that of Mask and Will and whose sexual intercourse symbolizes apocalypse. The image of sexual apocalypse in Yeats is utterly Blakean and is closely related to the mask image. Here, as in his discussion of the vortex, Mr. Ellmann oversimplifies. But he redeems himself handsomely by suggesting that though Blake's influence is startlingly apparent in particulars, perhaps the main effect of Blake is the "gradually increasing pressure in Yeats's poetry from powerful congeries of symbolic images."

Mr. Ellmann's book contains two most interesting documents, previously unpublished—Yeats's account of a meeting with the young Joyce, and sections of a dialogue called "The Poet and the Actress." He supplies us also with a chronology of the composition of the poems and notes "towards a reading" of various poems. These notes include explanations and significant references to Yeats's prose. Both the chronology and the notes are most useful to any student of the poet.

Mr. Ellmann's book, as do almost all books on Yeats, makes considerable use of Yeats's letters, many of which have not been published in any large collected edition. Now we have *The Letters of W. B. Yeats,* published by Macmillan (Rupert Hart-Davis is the British publisher), which appears for a moment to be what it is not—a complete edition of all known Yeats letters. Actually, instead of its being called *The Letters of W. B. Yeats,* something like *Selected Letters* would be better. What is missing from it makes a most impressive list: the whole correspondence with Sturge Moore (recently published by Oxford), most of the Dorothy Wellesley correspondence (available, too, in an Oxford edition), the letters to Joyce, Shaw, Pound, Synge, and Mrs. Yeats. Mr. Allan Wade, the editor of the volume, explains why these letters are missing; and we accept his various explanations. Nevertheless, the book masquerades as something it is not.

In spite of the omissions, there is a great deal of most interesting material here, especially the correspondence with Olivia Shakespear, which tells us from

time to time some illuminating things about Yeats's symbolism; letters to John O'Leary, which give us insights into the early Yeats; and letters to Katherine Tynan on a variety of subjects. There are some marvellously amusing anecdotes, and there are indications of the extremely precarious financial situation in which Yeats lived for so long (one somehow doesn't associate Yeats with poverty). Above all, there are indications of a side of Yeats not yet fully explored by anyone: Yeats as an Irishman in the swim of Irish political, literary, and theatrical life. Of Yeats's biographers only Hone really sees Yeats as an Irishman, and Hone mars his work by assuming knowledge of the Irish scene which most American readers simply do not have.

Under Allan Wade's editorship this selection of letters provides us with much information succinctly given in biographical introductions to the various sections and footnotes telling us about the people to whom the letters are addressed and the people who are mentioned. Yeats, of course, provides the rest of the story. *The Letters of W. B. Yeats* is a kind of autobiography, well edited. One only regrets that many people who should have been main characters never appear.

I am not as yet able to understand the principle upon which the index of the book is constructed. In the front of the book is a list of page references to all the letters, arranged in order of recipients. Some of these references appear in the regular index, some do not.

WALLACE FOWLIE:

Three Poets

ISABELLA GARDNER: *Birthdays from the Ocean.* Houghton Mifflin.

EDWIN HONIG: *The Moral Circus.* Contemporary Poetry.

BEN BELITT: *Wilderness Stair.* Grove Press.

Birthdays from the Ocean is the first volume to be published by Miss Gardner, but all thirty-one poems have already appeared in the literary magazines. Collected together, these poems present a work of significance, of achievement in the art of poetry. Deliberately Isabella Gardner removes from her writing all trace of pathos, but there is feeling, sympathy and even anguish in the verse. Poetry is a revealing to herself of her own world of animals and birds, of flowers and children. She seeks a profound and real contact with things, and through them, a contact with herself. Her knowledge of the world is a sense of exile, of distance, of fear, of small fears that count. The joy she expresses in the pure elements of nature: sun, night, the substance of things, is offset by her disregard for death:

> I said to them I am a girl of flesh and bone, my shift's no shroud.

The outside world speaks to this poet, animates her, solicits her. A blue heron encountered in desert water stops her and her mare, and then causes her to follow after. An action in these poems has the power of releasing the poet, of proving the reality of action and movement to her. This outer action assures the inner tension and the purity of the self.

Such a first volume as this is far more than an offering of promises, of themes related to admired poets, of technical experimentation. It stands quite securely by itself, and reveals, as the pages are turned, an identifiable sensibility and experience. The ancient theme of exile, implicit in the line which serves as title for the entire book, "Birthdays from the Ocean," is perhaps the central focus of most of the poems. The symbols of horse, desert, zoo and museum, of birds found "intolerable" and of "an alien landscape" are too prevalent to escape attention. Isabella Gardner is a poet concentrating her energies and her memories on the frontiers of consciousness because the central object has been willfully obscured or forgotten or has not yet come into view. This is no criticism of the poems as poems, but an effort to understand them in relationship to the poet. They seem often to be celebrations of mysteries carried out in strange foreign places. As the consciousness grows clearer and the apprehension sharper, so does the evidence for the strange and the foreign grow stronger. These poems have reached their form in their depiction of the ever changing forms of the poet's inner life.

Mr. Honig's collection of twenty-five poems, *The Moral Circus,* is volume eight in a distinguished series published by "Contemporary Poetry" in Baltimore. The language of this poet is direct, simple, even colloquial:

> The morning shuddered once and stalled

and the thought of the poem is almost always involved and subtle. The second poem, for example, "Hamlet," combines ingredients of literary criticism and psychology. But it is a poem too, as well as "Sleepers," which follows it, and which is an essay on time and seasons and even perhaps on autobiography.

Edwin Honig is inventive and adroit in *The Moral Circus,* which I believe is his second volume of verse. This circus seems to be attended by the poet, alone, on his holiday, when he is continuously solicited, in spite of himself, by literary adventures and by some of the basic problems of humanity. But he remains steadfastly a poet, through "Last Act," appropriately the final poem in the book, and the one which seems to me the most brilliantly and boldly constructed.

These images taken from the circus and the stage, and from meditations on such subjects as "Walt Whitman," establish the variations of the ego, of the "self" with which this poet is concerned. And yet he knows that the individual being is not imaginary, his identity is not an accident. He feels led, implacably so, in his poet's vocation, to postulating the existence of this identity. The poems may appear to be separate metamorphoses, but a principle of unification binds them together, which survives all analyses and all doubts. The lonely circus spectator questions a reality which he knows to be impenetrable. In the silence which often comes in the midst of fanfare, he learns by ideas and words, and constructions of ideas and words.

Ben Belitt is familiar with varied and contrasting landscapes: the granite of a Vermont quarry, the gulf of Mexico, the dunes of Nantucket, a California valley, the tile floor of a Manhattan stairway, cactus gardens and bull-rings in Mexico, the dogwood of Virginia, Battery Park. This writer is entomologist and explorer, but his secret is a poet's. His world is being perpetually renewed, but his poems are inner creations stimulated by the visible scenes. One half of the poems in *Wilderness Stair* are grouped under the title "Departures." The places are recomposed after the departure is over. But it is significant that no matter what the place is, the conflict and the conduct are the same. The being of this poet is immobile and infinite. Colors and particular objects, towns and market squares are, in the last analysis, appearance, accident, deception. The affirmation of the problems, of an ethical and religious nature, grows, despite the poet himself, or despite the poet's sensitivity to color and movement, to fronds and sky.

In the poems of the second half of the book, subdivided into three parts, the religious problem dominates and completes the drama begun in the first half. The "departures" are over, or are seen in another perspective. Saint Augustine's statement, used by Mr. Belitt as epigraph for "Cricket Hill: Vermont," now comes into full force: "Place there is none; we go backward and forward, and there is no place." We observe the game of being and non-being. The poems now unfold against an immobile and absolute background. The conscience of the poet reassembles constraints and fears and suffering. Here, the places become references, commodious references.

I do not believe that Ben Belitt or any other major poet of his generation in America bases his work on the assurance that the poet is invested with anything that might be called a "mission." But nevertheless, in each of the principal poems of *Wilderness Stair*, especially in the second part ("The Habit of Angels") and the third part ("Karamazov"), is present the metaphysical agitation with which today's world is plagued. Periodically poets are questioned as to whether they participate in the problems and the efforts of their time. The poet's reply to this query is his poems. Mr. Belitt's title, *Wilderness Stair*, comes from his poem, "Jacob and His Angel," and refers to Jacob's dream:

> Contest, the habit of angels,
> Tempted the man from the wilderness stair.

But the poem itself is concerned with Jacob's struggle with the angel, with man's will to extract his blessing from God. The themes in the other religious poems on Job, Mary, David, and the two poems on Karamazov would lead one to believe that this poet places mankind today in a period of harsh judgment where the cosmic laws and psychological and moral orders are being questioned. These poems are intricately woven representations of sacred symbolism. They provide no ritualistic demonstration, and they offer no trace of edification. Ben Belitt is not a religious poet, in the sense that Claudel is, but he is a religious poet in the tradition of Rimbaud (whom Mr. Belitt admires and has admirably translated).

This poet is a kind of prophet who preserves fragments of images and frag-

ments of visions. No system of metaphysics or theology is apparent in these pages, but they relate a series of moments when God is questioned and when those through whom He has spoken are questioned. Pathos is not absent from these poems. Their beauty depends on a religious state of feeling out of which they grew. The implicit subject of every poem is the poet whom a man cannot conceal from himself. That is, I suppose, why so much of the best modern poetry appears poetry of knowledge, epistemological poetry. The poet thinks the universe; he is consubstantial with it.

CORRECTION: In the review of Edith Sitwell and W. H. Auden by Babette Deutsch, appearing in the Spring 1955 issue, the phrase "the amoral exhaustion of our times" (p. 152, l.7) should read "the moral exhaustion of our times." Also, Miss Deutsch's most recent book is *Animal, Vegetable, Mineral,* a collection of poems.

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A NOTICE TO OUR READERS: It is well known that Dylan Thomas left behind him many non-commercial or "home" recordings, on wire, tape or disc; now his recording publishers are trying to get hold of such unpublished recordings in order that they may be made available to the general public. This seems, in terms of the future, an important project. If you have *un*published recordings by Dylan Thomas, or know of anybody who has, please write Carl Hartman, English Department, Cornell University, Ithaca, N. Y.